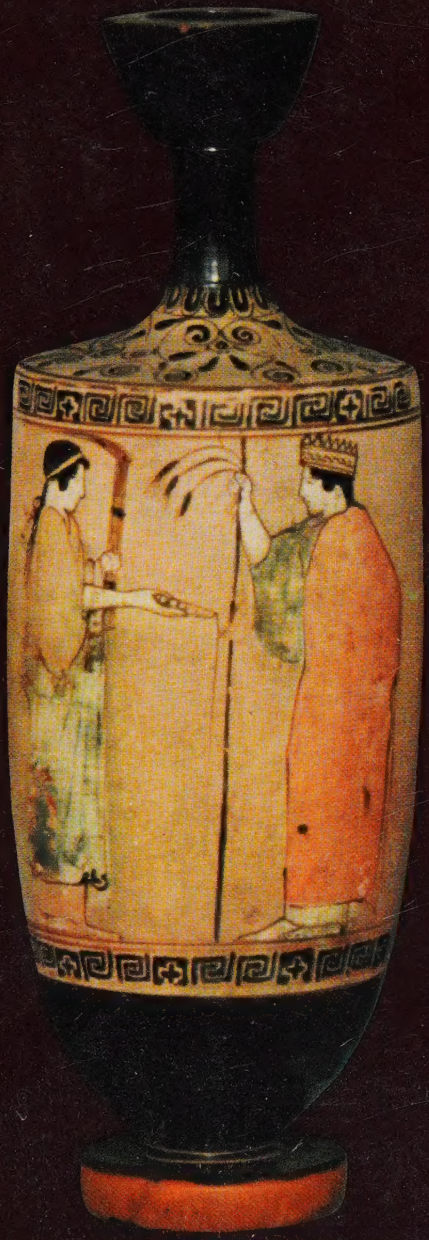
THE ROAD TO ELEUSIS

Unveiling the Secret of the Mysteries

by R. Gordon Wasson, Carl A. P. Ruck, Albert Hofmann



$4.95 A Harvest/HBJ Book

Ethno-mycological Studies
No. 4

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R. Gordon Wasson
Albert Hofmann
Carl A. P. Ruck

A Harvest/HBJ Book

A HELEN AND KURT WOLFF BOOK
HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH
New York and London

To
Richard Evans Schultes, Ph.D., M.H. (Hon.)

Pioneer Explorer of Psychotropic Plants in the New World

Holder of the Paul C. Mangelsdorf Chair in the Natural Sciences
Director and Curator of Economic Botany
Botanical Museum of Harvard University

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN 0-15-625279-1

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 78-50734

First Harvest/HBJ edition 1978

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FOREWORD

So much has been written about the Eleusinian Mysteries and for so long a time that a word is needed to justify this presentation of three papers dealing with them. For close to 2,000 years the Mystery was performed every year (except one) for carefully screened initiates in our month of September. Everyone speaking the Greek language was free to present himself, except only those who had the unexpiated blood of a murdered man on their hands. The initiates lived through the night in the telesterion of Eleusis, under the leadership of the two hierophantic families, the Eumolpids and the Kerykes, and they would come away all wonderstruck by what they had lived through: according to some, they were never the same as before. The testimony about that night of awe-inspiring experience is unanimous and Sophocles speaks for the initiates when he says:

> Thrice happy are those of mortals, who having seen those rites depart for Hades; for to them alone is granted to have a true life there. For the rest, all there is evil.

Yet up to now no one has known what justifies utterances such as this, and there are many like it. Here lies for us the mystery of the Eleusinian Mysteries. To this mystery we three have applied ourselves and believe we have found the solution, close to 2,000 years after the last performance of the rite and some 4,000 years since the first.

The first three chapters of this book were read by the respective authors as papers before the Second International Conference on Hallucinogenic Mushrooms held on the Olympic Peninsula, Washington, on Friday, 28 October 1977.

R. G. W.

Chapter one

THE WASSON ROAD TO ELEUSIS

With this little book we begin a new chapter in the history of the fifty-year-old discipline of ethnomycology, a chapter that for the first time takes within its purview, and in a big way, our own cultural past, our legacy from ancient Greece. Ethnomycology is simply the study of the role of mushrooms, in the broadest sense, in the past of the human race; and it is a branch of ethnobotany.

The English language lacks a word to designate the higher fungi. 'Toadstool' is an epithet, a pejorative designation embracing all those fungal growths that the user distrusts, whether rightly or wrongly. 'Mushroom' is ambiguous, covering different areas of the fungal world for different persons. In this little book we will use 'mushroom' for all the higher fungi. Now that at long last the world is coming to know these fungal growths in all their myriad shapes and colors and smells and textures, perhaps this novel usage will answer to a need and come to be generally accepted.

We are three who have enlisted for this presentation. Dr. Albert Hofmann is the Swiss chemist renowned for his discovery in 1943 of LSD, but his familiarity with the plant alkaloids is encyclopaedic and he will draw our attention to attributes of some of them relevant to the Eleusinian Mysteries.

As we are dealing with a central theme of Greek civilization in antiquity, it was obvious that we needed the cooperation of a Greek scholar. At the appropriate moment I learned of Professor Carl A. P. Ruck, of Boston University, who for some years has been making notable discoveries in the recalcitrant area of Greek ethnobotany. For many months we three have been studying the proposal that we are making and his paper will be the third and concluding one. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is the source for the myth that underlies Eleusis and we offer a new English rendering of it by Danny Staples.

It will be my function, in this first of three papers, to stress certain attributes of the cult of inebriating mushrooms in Mexico.

Early Man in Greece, in the second millennium before Christ, founded the Mysteries of Eleusis and they held spellbound the initiates who each year attended the rite. Silence as to what took place there was obligatory: the laws of Athens were extreme in the penalties that were imposed on any who infringed the secret, but throughout the Greek world, far beyond the reach of Athens' laws, the secret was kept spontaneously throughout Antiquity, and since the suspension of the Mysteries in the 4th century A. D. that Secret has become a built-in element in the lore of Ancient Greece. I would not be surprised if some classical scholars would even feel that we are guilty of a sacrilegious outrage at now prying open the secret. On 15 November 1956 I read a brief paper before the American Philosophical Society describing the Mexican mushroom cult and in the ensuing oral discussion I intimated that this cult might lead us to the solution of the Eleusinian Mysteries. A famous English archaeologist specializing in the archaeology of Greece, with whom I had had the friendliest relations for about thirty-five years, wrote me in a letter a little later the following:

> I do not think that Mycenae had anything to do with the divine mushroom or the Eleusinian mysteries either. May I add a word of warning? Stick to your Mexican mushroom cult and beware of seeing mushrooms everywhere. We much enjoyed your Philadelphia paper and would recommend you keep as close to that as you can. Forgive the frankness of an old friend.

I am sorry that he has now joined the shades in Hades, or perhaps I should be happy that he will not be pained by my brashness in disregarding his well-meant advice.

*

My late wife Valentina Pavlovna and I were the first to use the term ethnomycology and we have been closely identified with the

progress in this discipline over the past fifty years. That the reader may sense the drama of this our latest discovery I will begin by retelling the story of our mushroomic adventure. It covers precisely the last fifty years. It constitutes in large measure the autobiography of the Wasson family, and it has now led us directly to Eleusis.

Late in August 1927 my bride, as she then was, and I took our delayed honeymoon in the chalet lent to us by the publisher Adam Dingwall at Big Indian in the Catskills. She was a Russian born in Moscow of a family of the intelligentsia. Tina had fled from Russia with her family in the summer of 1918, she being then 17 years old. She qualified as a physician at the University of London and had been working hard to establish her pediatric practice in New York. I was a newspaper man in the financial department of the *Herald Tribune*. On that first beautiful afternoon of our holiday in the Catskills, we went sauntering down the path for a walk, hand in hand, happy as larks, both of us abounding in the joy of life. There was a clearing on the right, a mountain forest on our left.

Suddenly Tina threw down my hand and darted up into the forest. She had seen mushrooms, a host of mushrooms, mushrooms of many kinds that peopled the forest floor. She cried out in delight at their beauty. She addressed each kind with an affectionate Russian name. Such a display she had not seen since she left her family's *dacha* near Moscow, almost a decade before. She knelt before those toadstools in poses of adoration like the Virgin hearkening to the Angel of the Annunciation. She began gathering some of the fungi in her apron. I called to her: 'Come back, come back to me! They are poisonous, putrid. They are toadstools. Come back to me!' She only laughed the more: her merry laughter will ring forever in my ears. That evening she seasoned the soup with the fungi, she garnished the meat with other fungi. Yet others she threaded together and strung up to dry, for winter use as she said. My discomfiture was complete. That night I ate

nothing with mushrooms in it. Frantic and deeply hurt, I was led to wild ideas: I told her that I would wake up a widower.

She proved right and I wrong.

The particular circumstances of this episode seem to have shaped the course of our lives. We began checking with our compatriots, she with Russians and I with Anglo-Saxons. We quickly found that our individual attitudes characterized our respective peoples. Then we began gathering information, at first slowly, haphazardly, intermittently. We assembled our respective vocabularies for mushrooms: the Russian was endless, never to this day exhausted; the English, essentially confined to three words, two of them ill-defined – toadstool, mushroom, fungus. The Russian poets and novelists filled their writings with mushrooms, always in a loving context. It would seem to a stranger that every Russian poet composes verses on mushroom-gathering almost as a rite of passage to qualify for mature rating! In English the silence of many writers about mushrooms is deafening: Chaucer and Milton never mention them, the others seldom. For Shakespeare, Spenser, William Penn, Laurence Sterne (extensively), Shelley, Keats, Tennyson, for Edgar Allan Poe and D. H. Lawrence and Emily Dickinson, 'mushroom' and 'toadstool' are unpleasant, even disgusting epithets. Our poets when they do mention them link them to decay and death. We began to cast our net wider and to study all the peoples of Europe, not only the German and French and Italians, but more especially the peripheral cultures, out of the main stream, where archaic forms and beliefs survive longest – the Albanian, Frisian, Lappish, Basque, Catalonian and Sardinian, Icelandic and Faroese, and of course the Hungarian and the Finnish. In all our inquiries and travels we looked, not to the erudite, but to the humble and illiterate peasants as our most cherished informants. We explored their knowledge of mushrooms and the uses to which they put them. We were careful also to take the flavor of the scabrous and erotic vocabularies often neglected by lexicographers. We examined the common names

for mushrooms in all these cultures, seeking the fossil metaphors hiding in their etymologies, to discover what those metaphors expressed, whether a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward our earthy creatures.

A little thing, some of you may say, this difference in emotional attitude toward wild mushrooms. But my wife and I did not think so, and we devoted most of our leisure hours for decades to dissecting it, defining it, and tracing it to its origin. Such discoveries as we have made, including the rediscovery of the religious role for the hallucinogenic mushrooms of Mexico, can be laid to our preoccupation with that cultural rift between my wife and me, between our respective peoples, between the mycophilia and mycophobia (words that we devised for our two attitudes) that divide the Indo-European peoples into two camps. If this hypothesis of ours be wrong, then it must have been a singular false hypothesis to have borne the fruit that it has. But it is not wrong. Thanks to the immense strides made in the study of the human psyche in this century, we are all now aware that deep-seated emotional attitudes acquired in early life are of profound importance. I suggest that when such traits betoken the attitudes of whole tribes or peoples, when those traits have remained unaltered throughout recorded history, and especially when they differ from one people to another neighboring people, then you are face to face with a phenomenon of deepest cultural implications, whose primal cause is to be discovered only in the well-springs of cultural history.

Our card files and correspondence kept expanding and in the end, sometime in the early 1940's, we sat down, Tina and I, and asked ourselves what we were going to do with all our data. We decided to write a book, but there were so many lacunae in our evidence that it would be years before we could put words to paper. In our conversations at that time we found that we had been thinking along the same lines, afraid to express our thoughts even to each other: they were too fantastic. We had both come to

discern a period long long ago, long before our ancestors knew how to write, when those ancestors must have regarded a mushroom as a divinity or quasi-divinity. We knew not which mushroom(s) nor why. In the days of Early Man his whole world was shot through with religious feeling and the unseen powers held him in thrall. Our sacred 'mushroom' must have been wondrous indeed, evoking awe and adoration, fear, yes, even terror. When that early cult gave way to new religions and to novel ways emerging with a literate culture, the emotions aroused by the old cult would survive, truncated from their roots. In one area the fear and terror would live on, either of a particular mushroom (as in the case of *A. muscaria*); or else, as the emotional focus through tabu became vague, of 'toadstools' in general; and in another area, for a reason that we cannot now tell, it was the spirit of love and adoration that survived. Here would lie the explanation of the mycophobia *vs* mycophilia that we had discovered. ('Toadstool', incidentally, was originally the specific name of *A. muscaria*, the divine mushroom, of a beauty befitting its divinity. Through tabu, 'toadstool' lost its focus and came to hover over the whole of the mushroom tribe that the mycophobe shuns.)

*

It was in Mexico that our pursuit of a hypothetical sacred mushroom first achieved its goal. On 19 September 1952 we received in the post two letters from Europe: one from Robert Graves enclosing a cutting from a pharmaceutical journal in which there were quotations from Richard Evans Schultes, who in turn cited a number of 16th century Spanish friars telling of a strange mushroom cult among the Indians of Mesoamerica; the second from Giovanni Mardersteig, our printer in Verona, sending us his sketch of a curious archaeological artifact from Mesoamerica. It was exhibited in the Rietberg Museum of Zurich. The artifact was of stone, about a foot high, obviously a mushroom, with a radiant being carved on the stem or what myco-

logists call the stipe. Here was perhaps the very cult we were seeking, well within our reach. Earlier we had resolved that we would avoid the New World and Africa in our inquiries: the world was too large and our hands were full with Eurasia. But in a trice we changed our minds and the course of our studies, and we concentrated on Mexico and Guatemala. We had been postulating a wild mushroom as a focus of religious devotion, a fantastic surmise. Now here it was on our doorstep. All that winter we went racing through the texts of the 16th century Spanish friars, and what extraordinary narratives they give us! We flew down to Mexico in that summer of 1953 and for many rainy seasons thereafter. With wonderful cooperation from everyone in that country, on the night of 29-30 June 1955 we finally made our breakthrough: my photographer and friend Allan Richardson and I participated with our Indian friends in a midnight agapé conducted by a shaman of extraordinary quality. This was the first time on record that anyone of the alien race had shared in such a communion. It was a soul-shattering experience. The wild surmise that we had dared to postulate in a whisper to each other years before was at last vindicated. And now, nearly a quarter of a century later, we are prepared to offer another mushroom, *Claviceps purpurea*, as holding the secret to the Eleusinian Mysteries.

That there might be a common denominator between the Mexican mushroom Mystery and the Mystery of Eleusis had struck me at once. They both aroused an overwhelming sense of awe, of wonder. I will leave to Professor Ruck the discussion of Eleusis but will quote one ancient author, Aristides the Rhetor, who in the 2nd century A. D. pulled aside the curtain for an instant when he said that what the initiate experienced was 'new, astonishing, inaccessible to rational cognition', and he went on:

> Eleusis is a shrine common to the whole earth, and of all the divine things that exist among men, it is both the most awesome and the most luminous. At what place in the world have more miraculous tidings been sung, and where have the

> dromena called forth greater emotion, *where has there been greater rivalry between seeing and hearing*? [Italics mine.]

And he goes on to speak of the 'ineffable visions' that it had been the privilege of many generations of fortunate men and women to behold.

This description point by point tallies with the effect on the initiate of the Mesoamerican mushroom rite, even to the 'rivalry' between seeing and hearing. For the sights that one sees assume rhythmical contours, and the singing of the shaman seems to take on visible and colorful shapes.

There seems to have been a saying among the Greeks that mushrooms were the 'food of the Gods', *brōma theon*, and Porphyrius is quoted as having called them 'nurslings of the Gods', *theotrōphos*. The Greeks of the classic period were mycophobes. Was this not because their ancestors had felt that the whole fungal tribe was infected 'by attraction' with the holiness of the sacred mushroom, and that mushrooms were therefore to be avoided by mortal men? Are we not dealing with what was in origin a religious tabu?

I would not be understood as contending that only these alkaloids (wherever found in nature) bring about visions and ecstasy. Clearly some poets and prophets and many mystics and ascetics seem to have enjoyed ecstatic visions that answer the requirements of the ancient Mysteries and that duplicate the mushroom agapé of Mexico. I do not suggest that St. John of Patmos ate mushrooms in order to write the Book of the Revelation. Yet the succession of images in his Vision, so clearly seen but such a phantasmagoria, means for me that he was in the same state as one bemushroomed. Nor do I suggest for a moment that William Blake knew the mushroom when he wrote this telling account of the clarity of 'vision':

> The Prophets describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men, whom they saw with their imaginative and im-

> mortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object. *A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour, or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing eye can see, does not imagine at all.* [Italics mine. From *The Writings of William Blake*, ed. by Geoffrey Keynes, vol. III, p. 108]

This must sound cryptic to one who does not share Blake's vision or who has not taken the mushroom. The advantage of the mushroom is that it puts many, if not everyone, within reach of this state without having to suffer the mortifications of Blake and St. John. It permits you to see, more clearly than our perishing mortal eye can see, vistas beyond the horizons of this life, to travel backwards and forwards in time, to enter other planes of existence, even (as the Indians say) to know God. It is hardly surprising that your emotions are profoundly affected, and you feel that an indissoluble bond unites you with the others who have shared with you in the sacred agapé. All that you see during this night has a pristine quality: the landscape, the edifices, the carvings, the animals – they look as though they had come straight from the Maker's workshop. This newness of everything – it is as though the world had just dawned – overwhelms you and melts you with its beauty. Not unnaturally, what is happening to you seems to you freighted with significance, beside which the humdrum events of everyday are trivial. All these things you see with an immediacy of vision that leads you to say to yourself, 'Now I am seeing for the first time, seeing direct, without the intervention of mortal eyes.'

Plato tells us that beyond this ephemeral and imperfect existence here below, there is another Ideal world of Archetypes, where the original, the true, the beautiful Pattern of things exists for evermore. Poets and philosophers for millennia have pondered

and discussed his conception. It is clear to me where Plato found his 'Ideas'; it was clear to those who were initiated into the Mysteries among his contemporaries too. Plato had drunk of the potion in the Temple of Eleusis and had spent the night seeing the great Vision.

And all the time that you are seeing these things, the priestess in Mexico sings, not loud, but with authority. The Indians are notoriously not given to displays of inner feelings – except on these occasions. The singing is good, but under the influence of the mushroom you think it is infinitely tender and sweet. It is as though you were hearing it with your mind's ear, purged of all dross. You are lying on a *petate* or mat; perhaps, if you have been wise, on an air mattress and in a sleeping bag. It is dark, for all lights have been extinguished save a few embers among the stones on the floor and the incense in a sherd. It is still, for the thatched hut is apt to be some distance away from the village. In the darkness and stillness, that voice hovers through the hut, coming now from beyond your feet, now at your very ear, now distant, now actually underneath you, with strange ventriloquistic effect. The mushrooms produce this illusion also. Everyone experiences it, just as do the tribesmen of Siberia who have eaten of *Amanita muscaria* and lie under the spell of their shamans, displaying as these do their astonishing dexterity with ventriloquistic drum beats. Likewise, in Mexico, I have heard a shaman engage in a most complicated percussive beat: with her hands she hits her chest, her thighs, her forehead, her arms, each giving a different resonance, keeping a complicated rhythm and modulating, even syncopating, the strokes. Your body lies in the darkness, heavy as lead, but your spirit seems to soar and leave the hut, and with the speed of thought to travel where it listeth, in time and space, accompanied by the shaman's singing and by the ejaculations of her percussive chant. What you are seeing and what you are hearing appear as one: the music assumes harmonious shapes, giving visual form to its harmonies, and what you are seeing

takes on the modalities of music – the music of the spheres. 'Where has there been greater rivalry between seeing and hearing?' How apposite to the Mexican experience was the ancient Greek's rhetorical question! All your senses are similarly affected: the cigarette with which you occasionally break the tension of the night smells as no cigarette before had ever smelled; the glass of simple water is infinitely better than champagne. Elsewhere I once wrote that the bemushroomed person is poised in space, a disembodied eye, invisible, incorporeal, seeing but not seen. In truth, he is the five senses disembodied, all of them keyed to the height of sensitivity and awareness, all of them blending into one another most strangely, until the person, utterly passive, becomes a pure receptor, infinitely delicate, of sensations.

As your body lies there in its sleeping bag, your soul is free, loses all sense of time, alert as it never was before, living an eternity in a night, seeing infinity in a grain of sand. What you have seen and heard is cut as with a burin in your memory, never to be effaced. At last you know what the ineffable is, and what ecstasy means. Ecstasy! The mind harks back to the origin of that word. For the Greeks *ekstasis* meant the flight of the soul from the body. I am certain that this word came into being to describe the effect of the Mystery of Eleusis. Can you find a better word than that to describe the bemushroomed state? In common parlance, among the many who have not experienced ecstasy, ecstasy is fun, and I am frequently asked why I do not reach for mushrooms every night. But ecstasy is not fun. Your very soul is seized and shaken until it tingles. After all, who will choose to feel undiluted awe, or to float through that door yonder into the Divine Presence? The unknowing vulgar abuse the word, and we must recapture its full and terrifying sense. . . . A few hours later, the next morning, you are fit to go to work. But how unimportant work seems to you, by comparison with the portentous happenings of that night! If you can, you prefer to stay close to the house, and, with those who lived through

that night, compare notes, and utter ejaculations of amazement.

I will convey to you the overwhelming impression of awe that the sacred mushrooms arouse in the native population of the Mexican highlands. In the Mazatec tribe where I ingested them for the first time these particular mushrooms are not 'mushrooms': they stand apart. One word – *thain*^{3} – embraces the whole fungal tribe, edible, innocuous but inedible, and toxic, – the whole fungal world except the sacred species. The sacred species are known by a name that in itself is a euphemism for some other name now lost: they are *ʔnti*^{1}*xi*^{3}*tho*^{3}. (In Mazatec each syllable must be pronounced in one of four tones or in slides from one tone to another, ^{1} being the highest. The initial ʔ is a glottal stop.) The first element, *ʔnti*^{1}, is a diminutive of affection and respect. The second element, *xi*^{3}*tho*^{3}, means 'that which leaps forth'. The whole word is thus: 'the dear little things that leap forth'. But this word is holy: you do not hear it uttered in the market place or where numbers of people are assembled. It is best to bring up the subject at night, by the light of a fire or a *vela* (votive candle), when you are alone with your hosts. Then they will dilate endlessly on the wonders of these wondrous mushrooms. For this euphemistic name they will probably use yet others, a further degree of euphemism, the *santitos*, the 'little saints', or again the 'little things' in Mazatec. When we were leaving the Mazatec mountains on horseback after our first visit there, we asked our muleteer Victor Hernández how it came about that the sacred mushrooms were called 'the dear little ones that leap forth'. He had traveled the mountain trails all his life and spoke Spanish although he could neither read nor write nor even tell time by the clock's face. His answer, breathtaking in sincerity and feeling, breathed the poetry of religion and I quote it word for word as he uttered it and as I put it down in my notebook at the time:

> El honguillo viene por sí mismo, no se sabe de dónde,
> como el viento que viene sin saber de dónde ni porqué.

> The little mushroom comes of itself, no one knows whence,
> like the wind that comes we know not whence nor why.

Victor was referring to the genesis of the sacred mushrooms: they leap forth seedless and rootless, a mystery from the beginning. Aurelio Carreras, town slaughterer in Huautla, when we asked him where the mushrooms take you, said simply: *Le llevan allí donde dios está*, 'They carry you there where God is'. According to Ricardo García González of Rio Santiago, 'To eat the mushrooms you must be clean: they are the blood of our Lord the Eternal Father.' *Hay que ser muy limpio, es la sangre de Nuestro Señor Padre Eterno.* These are Spanish-speaking villagers picked at random. They express religion in its purest essence, without intellectual content. Aristotle said of the Eleusinian Mysteries precisely the same: the initiates were to suffer, to feel, to experience certain impressions and moods. They were not to learn anything.

As man emerged from his brutish past, thousands of years ago, there was a stage in the evolution of his awareness when the discovery of a mushroom (or was it a higher plant?) with miraculous properties was a revelation to him, a veritable detonator to his soul, arousing in him sentiments of awe and reverence, and gentleness and love, to the highest pitch of which mankind is capable, all those sentiments and virtues that mankind has ever since regarded as the highest attribute of his kind. It made him see what this perishing mortal eye cannot see. How right the Greeks were to hedge about this Mystery, this imbibing of the potion, with secrecy and surveillance! What today is resolved into a mere drug, a tryptamine or lysergic acid derivative, was for him a prodigious miracle, inspiring in him poetry and philosophy and religion. Perhaps with all our modern knowledge we do not need the divine mushrooms any more. Or do we need them more than ever? Some are shocked that the key even to religion might be reduced to a mere drug. On the other hand, the drug is as mysterious as it ever was: 'like the wind that comes

we know not whence nor why.' Out of a mere drug comes the ineffable, comes ecstasy. It is not the only instance in the history of humankind where the lowly has given birth to the divine. Altering a sacred text, we would say that this paradox is a hard saying, yet one worthy of all men to be believed.

If our classical scholars were given the opportunity to attend the rite at Eleusis, to talk with the priestess, what would they not exchange for that chance? They would approach the precincts, enter the hallowed chamber, with the reverence born of the texts venerated by scholars for millennia. How propitious would their frame of mind be, if they were invited to partake of the potion! Well, those rites take place now, unbeknownst to the classical scholars, in scattered dwellings, humble, thatched, without windows, far from the beaten track, high in the mountains of Mexico, in the stillness of the night, broken only by the distant barking of a dog or the braying of an ass. Or, since we are in the rainy season, perhaps the Mystery is accompanied by torrential rains and punctuated by terrifying thunderbolts. Then, indeed, as you lie there bemushroomed, listening to the music and seeing the visions, you know a soul-shattering experience, recalling as you do the belief of some early peoples that mushrooms, the sacred mushrooms, are divinely engendered by Parjanya, the Aryan God of the Lightning-bolt, in the Soft Mother Earth.

Someone has called mycology the step-child of the sciences. Is it not now acquiring a wholly new and unexpected dimension? Religion has always been at the core of man's highest faculties and cultural achievements, and therefore I ask you now to contemplate our lowly mushroom – what patents of ancient lineage and nobility are coming its way!

R. Gordon Wasson

Chapter two

A CHALLENGING QUESTION AND MY ANSWER

In July 1975 I was visiting my friend Gordon Wasson in his home in Danbury when he suddenly asked me this question: whether Early Man in ancient Greece could have hit on a method to isolate an hallucinogen from ergot that would have given him an experience comparable to LSD or psilocybin. I replied that this might well have been the case and I promised to send him, after further reflection, an exposition of our present knowledge on the subject, which I already suspected would support my tentative position. Two years have passed, and here now is my answer.

Ergot is the English name for a fungal growth, the 'sclerotium' of a mushroom known to mycologists as *Claviceps purpurea* (Fr.) Tul. It is a parasite on rye and other cereals such as barley or wheat, and also on certain wild grasses. Other species of the genus Claviceps, viz *C. paspali* Stev. and Hall, *C. nigricans* Tul., and *C. glabra* Langdon, etc., are parasitical to many species and varieties of grasses. Ergot itself is not of uniform chemical composition: it occurs in 'biological' or 'chemical' races, differing from each other mainly by the composition of their alkaloidal constituents. (Chemists define 'alkaloids' as nitrogen-containing alkaline substances that represent the pharmacologically active principles of many plants.) Thus in Switzerland there exist three varieties of ergot of rye: (a) in the Midlands a race containing mainly the alkaloid ergotamine, (b) in the Valais one with alkaloids of the ergotoxine group, and (c) in the Grisons a variety with no alkaloids at all. Furthermore in other kinds of ergot – growing on wheat, on barley, on millet, on lolium, etc. – there are wide variations in alkaloidal makeup, sometimes depending on geographical location.

By far the most important of all kinds of ergot is ergot of rye,

purple-brown protrusions from the ears of rye. Ergot of rye (in scientific nomenclature: *Secale cornutum*) has been called in England 'horned rye', 'spiked rye', 'spurred rye', but most commonly 'ergot of rye', a translation of the French *ergot de seigle*. The word *ergot* is defined in the *Petit Larousse* as '*petit ongle pointu derrière le pied du coq*', 'small pointed talon behind the cock's foot', but the derivation of the French word *ergot* is uncertain. Other French names are *blé cornu, seigle ergoté, seigle ivre*. In German there seem to be more variants than in other languages: *Mutterkorn, Rockenmutter, Afterkorn, Todtenkorn, Tollkorn,* and many others. In German folklore there was a belief that, when the corn waved in the wind, the corn mother (a demon) was passing through the field; her children were the rye wolves (ergot). In our context we observe that of these names, two, *seigle ivre* ('drunken rye') and *Tollkorn* ('mad grain'), point to a knowledge of the psychotropic effects of ergot. This folk awareness of the mind-changing effects of ergot shows an intimate knowledge of its properties, at least among herbalists, deeply rooted in European traditions.

Ergot of rye has a storied past. Once a dreaded poison, it has become a rich treasure chamber of valuable pharmaceuticals.

In the Middle Ages bizarre epidemics occurred in Europe costing thousands of people their lives, occasioned by bread made from rye contaminated with ergot. These epidemics took two forms, *Ergotismus convulsivus*, characterized by nervous convulsive and epileptiform symptoms, and *Ergotismus gangraenosus*, in which gangrenous manifestations leading to mummification of the extremities were a prominent feature. Ergotism was also known as *ignis sacer* ('holy fire'), or 'St. Anthony's fire', because St. Anthony was the patron saint of a religious order founded to care for the victims of ergotism. The cause of these epidemics – bread contaminated with ergot – was not learned until the seventeenth century, and since then there have been only sporadic outbreaks of ergot poisoning.

Ergot was first mentioned as a remedy by the German physician Adam Lonitzer in 1582. He said it was being used by midwives to precipitate childbirth. The first scientific report on the use of ergot as a uterotonic agent was presented by the American physician John Stearns in 1808: 'Account of the *pulvis parturiens*'. But already in 1824 Dr. David Hosack, also American, recognizing the dangers of using ergot for accelerating childbirth, recommended that the drug be used only to control postpartum haemorrhage. Since then ergot has been used in obstetrics mainly for this purpose.[1] (This Dr. Hosack was a distinguished man. He was a physician to many of the eminent New Yorkers of his time, and he accompanied Alexander Hamilton to Weehawken heights for his fatal duel with Aaron Burr. This I learned from the admirable life of Hosack by Christine Robbins.)

The latest and most important chapter in the history of ergot deals with it as a rich source of pharmacologically useful alkaloids.[2] More than thirty alkaloids have been isolated from ergot and it is unlikely that many new ones will be discovered. Hundreds of chemical modifications of these natural alkaloids have been prepared and investigated pharmacologically. Today all these alkaloids are also available by total synthesis.

Medicinally the most useful alkaloids stem from ergot of rye. The first ergot alkaloid that found widespread therapeutic use was ergotamine, isolated by A. Stoll in 1918. It is the essential component of pharmaceutical preparations such as 'Cafergot' and 'Bellergal', medicaments against migraine and nervous disorders. Modern valuable ergot preparations are 'Hydergine' developed by A. Stoll and A. Hofmann in the Sandoz laboratories in Basel, containing hydrogenated ergotoxine alkaloids, used in

1. The standard monograph on the botany and history of ergot is G. Barger: *Ergot and Ergotism*, Gurney and Jackson, London, 1931. 2. The results of the chemical, pharmacological, and medicinal investigations on ergot alkaloids carried out in laboratories all over the world are reviewed in the monograph by A. Hofmann: *Die Mutterkornalkaloide*, F. Enke Verlag, Stuttgart, 1964.

the treatment of geriatric disorders, and 'Dihydergot' with dihydroergotamine as active component, for the therapy of circulatory disturbances.

Of special relevance to our problem here are the investigations into the alkaloid ergonovine, which is the specific uterotonic water-soluble principle of ergot. In 1932 H. W. Dudley and C. Moir in England discovered that water-soluble extracts of ergot, containing none of the water-insoluble alkaloids of the ergotamine-ergotoxine-type, elicited strong uterotonic activity. This observation led three years later to the isolation of the alkaloid responsible for this action simultaneously in four separate laboratories, which named it 'ergometrine', 'ergobasin', 'ergotocine,' 'ergostetrine', respectively. The International Pharmacopoeia Commission proposed a name to be internationally accepted to replace these synonyms, viz 'ergonovine'.

In 1937, starting with naturally occurring lysergic acid, I prepared ergonovine, which by its chemical composition is lysergic acid propanolamide illustrated in Fig. 1. Lysergic acid is the nucleus common to most ergot alkaloids. It is extracted from special cultures of ergot and could also be prepared today by total synthesis if this procedure were not too expensive. I used the method developed for the synthesis of ergonovine for the preparation of many chemical modifications of ergonovine. One of these partly synthetic derivatives of ergonovine was lysergic acid butanolamide. This is used today in obstetrics, replacing to a major extent ergonovine, under the brand name 'Methergine' to stop postpartum haemorrhage.

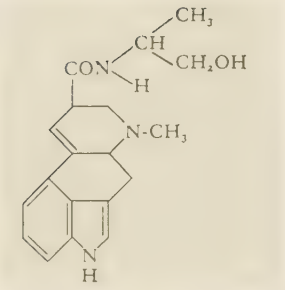
Another lysergic acid derivative that I synthesized in this context aiming to get an analeptic (that is, an agent with circulation- and respiration-stimulating properties) was lysergic acid diethylamide. (Fig. 1) Pharmacological examination revealed a fairly strong uterotonic activity in this compound, nearly as strong as ergonovine. In 1943 I discovered in self-experiments the specific high hallucinogenic potency of lysergic acid diethylamide, which

became known world-wide under the laboratory code name LSD-25.

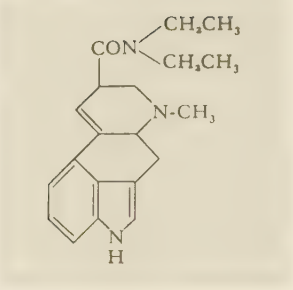
My interest in hallucinogenic agents, originating in 1943 from my work with LSD, brought me into personal contact with Gordon Wasson, pioneer ethnomycologist and also pioneer in the investigation of the ancient Mexican mushroom cult. From Roger Heim, then head of the Laboratoire de Cryptogamie and Director of the famous Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle of Paris, whom Wasson invited to study and identify in the field his sacred mushrooms, I received samples of them for chemical analysis. With my laboratory assistant Hans Tscherter I succeeded in isolating the hallucinogenic principles of the sacred Mexican mushrooms, which I named psilocybin and psilocin. With my colleagues of the Sandoz Research Laboratories, we succeeded in the elucidation of the chemical structure and the synthesis of psilocybin and psilocin.

Inspired by my talks with my friend Wasson and encouraged by our success with the hallucinogenic mushrooms, I decided to tackle also the problem of another psychotropic Mexican plant, *ololiuhqui*. With Wasson's help I obtained a large quantity of authentic *ololiuhqui* seeds of the two morning glories that the Mesoamerican Indians were using, seeds of *Turbina corymbosa* (L.) Raf. and *Ipomoea violacea* L. When we analyzed them we arrived at an unexpected result: these ancient drugs that we are apt to call 'magical' and the Indians consider divine, contained as their psychoactive principles some of our already familiar ergot alkaloids. The main components were lysergic acid amide and lysergic acid hydroxyethylamide, both water-soluble alkaloids, closely related to lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD), as is evident even to the non-chemist. (Fig. 1) Another constituent of the *ololiuhqui* alkaloids was ergonovine, the uterotonic principle of ergot.

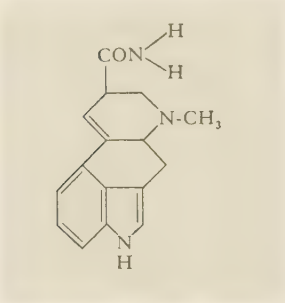
The psychoactive property of these simple lysergic acid amides, closely related to LSD, is well established. The question presented



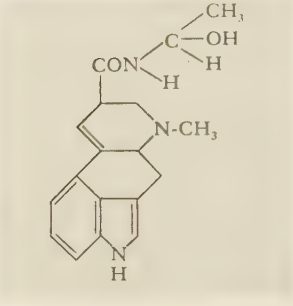
ergonovine
(lysergic acid propanolamide)



LSD
(lysergic acid diethylamide)



ergine
(lysergic acid amide)



lysergic acid hydroxyethylamide

FIG. 1

itself whether ergonovine, being not only an alkaloidal component of ergot but also of *ololiuhqui*, possessed hallucinogenic activity. In the light of its chemical structure this did not seem unlikely: it does not differ much from LSD. But one may ask why, if it is hallucinogenic, this astonishing fact has not been announced, in the light of its use over recent decades in obstetrics. Undoubtedly the answer lies in the extremely low dosage of ergonovine used to stop postpartum bleeding, viz 0.1 to 0.25 mg. The effective dose of lysergic acid amide is 1 to 2 mg by oral application. I decided therefore to test in a self-experiment a corresponding dose of ergonovine:

1 April 1976

12.20 h: 2.0 mg ergonovine hydrogenmaleinate, containing 1.5 mg ergonovine base, ingested in a glass of water.

13.00 h: slight nausea, same effect as I have experienced always in my LSD or psilocybin experiments. Tired, need to lie down. With eyes closed colored figures.

13.30 h: the trees in the nearby forest seem to live, their branches moving in a threatening way.

14.30 h: strong desire to dream, unable to do systematic work, with eyes closed or open afflicted by mollusk-like forms and feelings.

16.00 h: motives and colors have become clearer, but bearing still some hidden dangers.

17.00 h: after a short sleep I awoke by a kind of inner explosion of all the senses.

18.00 h: an unexpected visit forced me to become active, but during the whole evening I lived more in an inner than in the outer world.

22.00 h: all effects worn off, normal feeling.

This was an experiment performed without attention to 'set and setting' but it proves that ergonovine possesses a psychotropic, mood-changing, slightly hallucinogenic activity when taken in the same amount as is an effective dose of lysergic acid amide, the main constituent of *ololiuhqui*. Its potency is about one-twentieth of the potency of LSD and about five times that of psilocybin.

There is a further finding that may prove to be of utmost importance in considering Wasson's question. The main constituents of the Mexican morning-glory seeds are (a) lysergic acid amide (= 'ergine'), and (b) lysergic acid hydroxyethylamide, and these are also the main alkaloids in ergot growing on the wild grass *Paspalum distichum* L. This grass grows commonly all around the Mediterranean basin and is often infected with *Claviceps paspali*.

F. Arcamone *et al*[1] were the first to discover these alkaloids in ergot of *P. distichum*, in 1960.

Within the kinds of ergot produced by the various species of the genus *Claviceps* and its many hosts, cereals and wild grasses, types of ergot do exist that contain hallucinogenic alkaloids, the same alkaloids as in the Mexican hallucinogenic morning-glories. These alkaloids, mainly lysergic acid amide, lysergic acid hydroxyethylamide, and ergonovine, are soluble in water, in contrast to the non-hallucinogenic medicinally useful alkaloids of the ergotamine and ergotoxine type. With the techniques and equipment available in antiquity it was therefore easy to prepare an hallucinogenic extract from suitable kinds of ergot.

What suitable kinds of ergot were accessible to the ancient Greeks? No rye grew there, but wheat and barley did and *Claviceps purpurea* flourishes on both. We analyzed ergot of wheat and ergot of barley in our laboratory and they were found to contain basically the same alkaloids as ergot of rye, viz alkaloids of the ergotamine and ergotoxine group, ergonovine, and sometimes also traces of lysergic acid amide. As I said before, ergonovine and lysergic acid amide, both psychoactive, are soluble in water whereas the other alkaloids are not. As we all know, ergot differs in its chemical constituents according to its host grass and according to geography. We have no way to tell what the chemistry was of the ergot of barley or wheat raised on the Rarian plain in the 2nd millennium B. C. But it is certainly not pulling a long bow to assume that the barley grown there was host to an ergot containing, perhaps among others, the soluble hallucinogenic alkaloids. The famous Rarian plain was adjacent to Eleusis. Indeed this may well have led to the choice of Eleusis for Demeter's temple, and for the growth of the cluster of powerful myths surrounding them and Triptolemus that still exert their spell on us today.

1. Arcamone, F., Bonino, C., Chain, E. B., Ferretti, A., Pennella, P., Tonolo, A., and Vero, L.; *Nature* (London) *187*, 238 (1960).

The separation of the hallucinogenic agents by simple water solution from the non-soluble ergotamine and ergotoxine alkaloids was well within the range of possibilities open to Early Man in Greece. An easier method still would have been to have recourse to some kind of ergot like that growing on the grass *Paspalum distichum*, which contains only alkaloids that are hallucinogenic and which could even have been used directly in powder form. As I said before, *P. distichum* grows everywhere around the Mediterranean basin. During the many centuries when the Eleusinian Mysteries were thriving and holding the antique Greek world enthralled, may not the hierophants of Eleusis have been broadening their knowledge and improving their skills? For the Greek world as for us, the Mysteries are linked to Demeter and Kore, and they and Triptolemus are the famed mythical progenitors of cultivated wheat and barley. But in the course of time the hierophants could easily have discovered *Claviceps paspali* growing on the grass *Paspalum distichum*. Here they would be able to get their hallucinogen direct, straight and pure. But I mention this only as a possibility or a likelihood, and not because we need *P. distichum* to answer Wasson's question.

Finally we must also discuss an ergot parasitical to a wild grass called in scientific nomenclature *Lolium temulentum* L. In English this is most widely known as darnel or cockle or (in the Bible) tares, a weed that plagues grain crops. It is sometimes called 'wild rye grass', an unfortunate name because wild *rye* has nothing to do with rye: the *rye* of 'wild rye grass' is of utterly different etymology. In classic Greek darnel was *aira* and in classic Latin was *lolium*. Its name in French is *ivraie* and in German *Taumellolch*, both names pointing to a belief in its psychotropic activity in the folk knowledge of the traditional European herbalists. A citation for *ivraie* in A. D. 1236 has been found, and it must go back much further than that.

Analysis of *Lolium temulentum* in my laboratory and an extended botanical, chemical, and pharmacological investigation by

I. Katz[1] showed that the plant itself contains no alkaloids nor does it possess any pharmacological activity. But the Lolium species (*L. temulentum* and *L. perenne*) are notoriously prey to the Claviceps fungus. The psychotropic reputation of darnel must therefore be attributed to its parasitic infection by ergot. Samples of ergot grown on *L. temulentum* and *L. perenne* collected in Germany, France, and Switzerland showed large variation in their alkaloidal composition. Some contained substantial amounts of ergonovine together with alkaloids of the ergotamine and ergotoxine group.[2] A species of ergot growing on darnel may have existed in ancient Greece that contained mainly hallucinogenic alkaloids of ergot such as we have found in ergot of Paspalum.

In conclusion I now answer Wasson's question. The answer is yes, Early Man in ancient Greece could have arrived at an hallucinogen from ergot. He might have done this from ergot growing on wheat or barley. An easier way would have been to use the ergot growing on the common wild grass Paspalum. This is based on the assumption that the herbalists of ancient Greece were as intelligent and resourceful as the herbalists of pre-Conquest Mexico.

ALBERT HOFMANN

1. Katz, I.: Contribution à l'étude de l'ivraie enivrante (*Lolium temulentum* L.). Thèse présentée a l'Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale, Zurich, 1949. 2. Kobel, H., Sandoz Research Laboratories, Basel. Private communication.

Chapter three

SOLVING THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERY

We are told that there once was a young Athenian who was much taken with the beauty of a courtesan in one of the brothels of Corinth. His attempts to repay her favors in some special way were continually frustrated by the madam, who insisted upon confiscating all private gifts. To give the girl something that would be hers alone, he hit upon the idea of offering her an immaterial, and thereby inalienable, benefit: he would pay the expenses for her introduction into the blessed community of those who had witnessed the secret religious ceremony practiced at the village of Eleusis. That sight was generally considered the culminating experience of a lifetime. And so she was allowed to travel to Athens, together with the madam and a younger girl from the brothel. The lover lodged them all with a friend while they prepared themselves by the preliminary rites. The full sequence would require more than half a year's residence in Athens. Then at last, amidst the throng of thousands who each autumn for the first and only time made the pilgrimage, they too walked the Sacred Road, crossing the narrow bridge that still today can be seen, now submerged in the brackish waters of the swamp that once divided Athens from the territory of its neighboring village, some fourteen miles distant, a region sacred for its special affinity with the realm of departed spirits, who were thought to insure the fertility of the adjacent plain of grain. The procession of pilgrims symbolically passed the frontier between worlds, a momentous journey characterized by its difficulty, for the bridge was expressly constructed too narrow for vehicular traffic and ahead, just as they arrived at the village itself, it was traditional that they would be obscenely insulted by masked men, who lined the bridge across the final boundary of water.

Each year new candidates for initiation would walk that Sacred

Road, people of all classes, emperors and prostitutes, slaves and freemen, an annual celebration that was to last for upwards of a millennium and a half, until the pagan religion finally succumbed to the intense hatred and rivalry of a newer sect, the recently legitimized Christians in the fourth century of our era. The only requirement, beyond a knowledge of the Greek language, was the price of the sacrificial pig and the fees of the various priests and guides, a little more than a month's wages, plus the expense of the stay in Athens.

Every step of the way recalled some aspect of an ancient myth that told how the Earth Mother, the goddess Demeter, had lost her only daughter, the maiden Persephone, abducted as she gathered flowers by her bridegroom, who was Hades or the lord of death. The pilgrims called upon Iakchos as they walked. It was he who was thought to lead them on their way: through him, they would summon back the queen Persephone into the realm of the living. When at last they arrived at Eleusis, they danced far into the night beside the well where originally the mother had mourned for her lost Persephone. As they danced in honor of those sacred two goddesses and of their mysterious consort Dionysus, the god of inebriants, the stars and the moon and the daughters of Ocean would seem to join in their exultation. Then they passed through the gates of the fortress walls, beyond which, shielded from profane view, was enacted the great Mystery of Eleusis.

It was called a mystery because no one, under pain of death, could reveal what happened within the sanctuary. My colleagues and I, working from hints in numerous sources, have ventured to go beyond that forbidden gate.

Ancient writers unanimously indicate that something was seen in the great *telesterion* or initiation hall within the sanctuary. To say so much was not prohibited. The experience was a vision whereby the pilgrim became someone who saw, an *epoptes*. The hall, however, as can now be reconstructed from archaeological remains, was totally unsuited for theatrical performances; nor

do the epigraphically extant account books for the sanctuary record any expenditures for actors or stage apparatus. What was witnessed there was no play by actors, but *phasmata*, ghostly apparitions, in particular, the spirit of Persephone herself, returned from the dead with her new-born son, conceived in the land of death. The Greeks were sophisticated about drama and it is highly unlikely that they could have been duped by some kind of theatrical trick, especially since it is people as intelligent as the poet Pindar and the tragedian Sophocles who have testified to the overwhelming value of what was seen at Eleusis.

There were physical symptoms, moreover, that accompanied the vision: fear and a trembling in the limbs, vertigo, nausea, and a cold sweat. Then there came the vision, a sight amidst an aura of brilliant light that suddenly flickered through the darkened chamber. Eyes had never before seen the like, and apart from the formal prohibition against telling of what had happened, the experience itself was incommunicable, for there are no words adequate to the task. Even a poet could only say that he had seen the beginning and the end of life and known that they were one, something given by god. The division between earth and sky melted into a pillar of light.

These are the symptomatic reactions not to a drama or ceremony, but to a mystical vision; and since the sight could be offered to thousands of initiates each year dependably upon schedule, it seems obvious that an hallucinogen must have induced it. We are confirmed in this conclusion by two further observations: a special potion, as we know, was drunk prior to the visual experience; and secondly, a notorious scandal was uncovered in the classical age, when it was discovered that numerous aristocratic Athenians had begun celebrating the Mystery at home with groups of drunken guests at dinner parties.

To identify the Eleusinian drug, we must first find the pattern of meaning that underlies the Mystery. The sacred myth that narrates the events involved in the founding of the Mystery is

recorded in the so-called Homeric hymn to Demeter, an anonymous poem dating from the seventh century B. C., seven centuries later than the probable date of the first performance of the ceremony. In it we are told how the goddess Persephone was abducted by her bridegroom Hades to the realm of the dead when she picked a special hundred-headed *narkissos* while gathering flowers with the daughters of Ocean in a place called Nysa. All Greek words in *-issos* derive from the language spoken by the agrarian cultures dwelling in the Greek lands before the coming of the migrating Indo-European Greeks. The Greeks themselves, however, thought that the *narkissos* was so-named because of its narcotic properties, obviously because that was the essential nature or symbolism of Persephone's flower. The marital abduction or seizure of maidens while gathering flowers is, moreover, a common theme in Greek myths and Plato records a rationalized version of such stories in which the companion of the seized maiden is named Pharmaceia or, as the name means, the 'use of drugs'. The particular myth that Plato is rationalizing is in fact one that traced the descent of the priesthood at Eleusis. There can be no doubt that Persephone's abduction was a drug-induced seizure.

That fact has never been noticed by Classicists, despite its absolute expectability in terms of what we know about the religions of the agrarian peoples who preceded the Greeks. Those religions centered upon the female's procreativity and the cyclical rebirth and death of both plants and mankind. She was the Great Mother and the entire world was her Child. The essential event in those religions was the Sacred Marriage, in which the priestess periodically communed with the realm of spirits within the earth to renew the agricultural year and the civilized life that grew upon the earth. Her male consort was a vegetative spirit, both her son who grew from the earth and the mate who would abduct her to the fecundating other realm as he possessed her upon his death. When the roving Indo-Europeans settled in the Greek lands, their

immortal Father God of the sky, who was Zeus, became assimilated to the pattern of the dying and reborn vegetative consort of the Great Mother. There are indications of this assimilation in the traditions about the Zeus who was born and died in Crete. Furthermore, archaeological remains from the Minoan-Mycenaean period of Greek culture frequently depict visionary experience encountered by women engaged in rituals involving flowers. The priestesses or goddesses themselves occur as idols decorated with vegetative motifs, accompanied by their serpent consort or crowned with a diadem of opium capsules. Moreover, the myths that narrate the founding of the various Mycenean citadels show, as we might expect, recurrent variations upon the Sacred Marriage enacted between the immigrant founder and the autochthonous female in ecstatic contexts. Most interesting among these are the traditions about Mykenai (Mycenae) itself, for it was said to have been founded when the female of that place lost her head to the male of the new dynasty, who had picked a mushroom. The etymology of Mykenai, which was recognized in antiquity but has been repeatedly rejected by modern scholars, is correctly derived from Mykene, the bride of the *mykes* or mushroom. Fungoid manifestations of the vegetative consort in the Sacred Marriage can also be detected in the symbolism of the founding fathers at other Mycenaean sites, perhaps because that particular wave of immigrants brought knowledge of the wild and untameable mushroom with them on their movement south into the Greek lands. At Athens in the classical period, the ancient Sacred Marriage was still celebrated annually by the wife of the sacral head of state: in the month of February, she would unite with the god Dionysus.

It was as Dionysus that the Zeus who had been assimilated as consort to the Mother Goddess survived into the classical period. His name designates him as the Zeus of Nysa, for Dios is a form of the word Zeus. Nysa was not only, as we have seen, the place where Persephone was abducted, but also the name for wherever

was enacted that same nuptial encounter involving the passion of Dionysus' birth and death. When he possessed his women devotees, the maenads or bacchants, he was synonymous with Hades, the lord of death and bridegroom to the goddess Persephone. The maenads, like Persephone, also gathered flowers. We know this because their emblem was the *thyrsos*, a fennel stalk stuffed with ivy leaves; such hollow stalks were customarily used by herb gatherers as receptacles for their cuttings, and the ivy that was stuffed into the maenads' stalks was sacred to Dionysus and reputed to be a psychotropic plant.

Dionysus, however, could possess his ecstatic brides through the agency of other plants as well, for he was the vegetative consort residing in all manner of inebriants, including apparently certain of the fungi. The stipe, by analogy to the maenads' emblem, was also called a *thyrsos*, with the mushroom's cap substituted for the psychotropic herbs. Dionysus himself was born prematurely in the mystical seventh month during a winter snowfall when his celestial father struck his earth bride Semele at Thebes with a bolt of lightning; in the same manner mushrooms were thought to be engendered wherever lightning struck the earth. The father of Dionysus was another Dionysus, as would be expected in a Sacred Marriage, for the child born at the time of the earth's renewal is identical with the ingested consort who will reunite his mother-bride with the awesome nether realm from which life must forever be reborn. Thus not surprisingly we are told that Semele also conceived Dionysus when she drank a potion compounded of her own son's heart. So too was Dionysus like his father also called the thunderer, for despite the gentleness of his infancy and his sometimes effeminate appearance, he could suddenly metamorphose into the virulence of his full manhood, in which form he was a bull, rending the earth, as at his birth, announced by a bellowing, the *mykema* that signified the presence of the *mykes* or mushroom. His symbol was the *phallos* itself, by a common metaphor also called the *mykes*.

It was with the vine, however, and its fermented juice that Dionysus was chiefly associated. Mushrooms themselves in fact were considered a fermentation of the earth, a perfect symbol of rebirth from the cold realm of putrefaction that was the mouldy other world. A similar process was sensed in the frothing turmoil whereby the fungal yeast converted grapes into wine. In wine the god had found his greatest blessing for mankind; here his untameable, wild nature had succumbed to domestication. He himself was said to have first discovered the properties of this plant that had grown from the spilled blood of the gods when he noticed a serpent drinking its toxin from the fruit, for serpents were thought to derive their poisons from the herbs they ate, just as conversely it was said that serpents could transfer their toxins to plants in their vicinity. Dionysus taught man the way to calm this gift's violent nature by diluting it with water. And customarily it was mixed with water that the Greeks drank their wines.

This custom of diluting wine deserves our attention since the Greeks did not know the art of distillation and hence the alcoholic content of their wines could not have exceeded about fourteen per cent, at which concentration the alcohol from natural fermentation becomes fatal to the fungus that produced it, thereby terminating the process. Simple evaporation without distillation could not increase the alcoholic content since alcohol, which has a lower boiling point than water, will merely escape to the air, leaving the final product weaker instead of more concentrated. Alcohol in fact was never isolated as the toxin in wine and there is no word for it in ancient Greek. Hence the dilution of wine, usually with at least three parts of water, could be expected to produce a drink of slight inebriating properties.

That, however, was not the case. The word for drunkenness in Greek designates a state of raving madness. We hear of some wines so strong that they could be diluted with twenty parts of water and that required at least eight parts water to be drunk

safely, for, according to report, the drinking of certain wines straight actually caused permanent brain damage and in some cases even death. Just three small cups of diluted wine were enough in fact to bring the drinker to the threshold of madness. Obviously the alcohol could not have been the cause of these extreme reactions. We can also document the fact that different wines were capable of inducing different physical symptoms, ranging from slumber to insomnia and hallucinations.

The solution to this apparent contradiction is simply that ancient wine, like the wine of most early peoples, did not contain alcohol as its sole inebriant but was ordinarily a variable infusion of herbal toxins in a vinous liquid. Unguents, spices, and herbs, all with recognized psychotropic properties, could be added to the wine at the ceremony of its dilution with water. A description of such a ceremony occurs in Homer's *Odyssey*, where Helen prepares a special wine by adding the euphoric *nepenthes* to the wine that she serves her husband and his guest. The fact is that the Greeks had devised a spectrum of ingredients for their drinks, each with is own properties.

Thus the wine of Dionysus was the principle medium whereby the classical Greeks continued to partake of the ancient ecstasy resident in all the vegetative forms that were the Earth's child. In social situations, the drinking was regulated by a leader, who determined the degree of inebriation that he would impose upon the revellers as they ceremonially drank a measured sequence of toasts. At sacral events, the wine would be more potent and the express purpose of the drinking was to induce that deeper drunkenness in which the presence of the deity could be felt.

The herbal inebriants that figured in these Dionysian rites of drinking required magical procedures when the herbs were gathered. As wild beings whose spirits were akin to their particular guardian animals, the plants were the objects of a hunt. And the ecstatic rapture they might induce in religious contexts inevitably identified them as sexual forces.

Thus the female devotees of the god Dionysus appropriately bore the *thyrsos* as their emblem as they roamed the winter mountainsides in search of the so-called vine that grew suddenly with earth-rending thunder and the bellowing of bulls amidst their night-long dancing; that beloved child, the age-old serpent consort, was the object of their hunt, who was suckled, then like a beast torn to pieces and eaten raw; his own mothers, as was often claimed, were guilty of cannibalism eating his flesh, for like mothers the women would have brought the drug into being, harvesting and compounding it with the help of the god's so-called nurses, in whose loving care he would grow to manhood, eventually to possess them as his brides. Such ceremonies enacted the sacred nuptials of the city's women, who thereby entered the awesome alliance with the nether lord, upon whose realm depended the growth of all this world's fertility of plants and man.

Persephone's abduction at Nysa was prototypic of that first nuptial between the realms, the primal experience of death. In the hunting place called Agrai, in the month of February, which was called the time of flowers, the candidates for the coming initiation at Eleusis experienced in some way the death of Persephone through the ritual mimeses of those Dionysian events. That occurrence was termed the Lesser Mystery and it was considered a preliminary for the vision of the Greater Mystery that would take place at the time of the autumn sowing in September.

The Greater Mystery was the complement of the Lesser, for it centered upon redemption instead of death, the triumphant return of Persephone from Hades with the infant son she had conceived during her sojourn in communion with the spiritual realm. The Homeric hymn, after its account of Persephone's fatal nuptial encounter, goes on to tell how Demeter came to establish the Greater Mystery. In grief for her lost daughter, she went to Eleusis. Her journey there is a sympathetic imitation of Persephone's entrance into the citadel of Hades, for Eleusis was

a simulacrum of the other word, where Demeter too would experience the ominous chthonic phase of her womanhood, not as sacred queen to the lord of death, but as witch and wet-nurse in his house, for when Persephone progresses beyond maidenhood, her mother must make way, relinquishing her former role and moving on to the third stage, when a woman's aging womb brings her once again into proximity with the powers of death. These chthonic or earth-oriented phases of womanhood were symbolized in the goddess Hecate, whose triform body expressed the female's totality as bride, wife, and aged nurse in Hades' realm.

At Eleusis, Demeter first attempts to assuage her grief by negating the possibility of the world of death to which she has lost her daughter. She does this by nourishing the royal prince with immortality. His mother, however, objects, for she cannot understand or accept a system that would inevitably alienate the son from his own mother's realm as irredeemably as Persephone from Demeter.

Demeter again attempts a solution, this time an eternity of death, in which she and the maiden would stay forever in their chthonic phase. She causes a plague of sterility so that no life can emerge from the earth. This solution, however, leaves no role for the immortal deities of the sky, whose delicate balance with the forces of the earth is dependent upon the continuing worship of mortal men, who share with them the fruits of life.

The final solution is to heal the universe into which death has now intruded by admitting also the possibility of return into life. Rebirth from death was the secret of Eleusis. In Hades, Persephone, like the earth itself, takes seed into her body and thereby eternally comes back to her ecstatic mother with her new son, only to die as eternally in his fecundating embrace. The sign of the redemption was an ear of barley, the risen grain, that following the Mystery would be committed once again to the cold earth in the sowing of the sacred plain adjacent to Eleusis.

This was the final mediation that Demeter taught to a second

of the royal princes in the citadel of Eleusis. His name was Triptolemus, the trifold warrior, and he becomes the apostle of the new faith, travelling throughout the world on a serpent chariot spreading the gospel of the cultivation of grain. His exact identity was part of the secret of the Mystery, for the various traditions about his parentage suggest that the initiates learned that, like the grain that was his emblem, he was actually the son of the trifold females who were the queens in the house of the lord of death. He was, therefore, another form of Dionysus, who in a similar fashion also was an apostle, travelling in the same manner of cart on his journey teaching man the cultivation of the vine. The pattern indicated in these Eleusinian apostleships clearly signifies the transition from wild botanic growth to the arts of cultivation upon which civilized life must depend.

In the various Eleusinian mythical traditions, several other male figures symbolize a similar transmutation of the wild horror and loss that is death into the ravishingly handsome young man who is born from Hades' realm in pledge of the coming redemption. In one such tradition, he is Iakchos (Iacchus), the joyous Dionysian male who led the initiates toward their vision of salvation; in another, Eubuleus, the serene personification of the cosmological plan wherein the celestial immortals collaborated with the forces of death to show humankind its proper role; in a third, Zagreus, the enigmatic hunting companion of his ecstatic brides. The fourth and most perfect of these transmuted figures is Ploutos, the personification of the wealth that stems from the fertility of man and field. The initiate could expect that this beneficent representative of death would thereafter become welcome in his house as his constant guest, joined by ties of friendship. This Ploutos was originally the vegetative son of Demeter in her more ancient days as Great Mother on Crete, where she conceived him in a thrice plowed field when she united with her intoxicating mate whose name was Iasion, which means 'the man of the drug'.

Triptolemus, however, was the paramount transmutation, Demeter's special response to the problem of death. It was his sacred barley, solemnly grown in the Rarian plain and threshed on his floor, that was the principle ingredient in the potion drunk by the initiates in preparation for the culminating vision. The formula for that potion is recorded in the Homeric hymn. In addition to the barley, it contained water and a fragrant mint called *blechon*. The mint initially would seem the most likely candidate for the psychoactive agent in the potion, except that all our evidence about this particular mint indicates that it was unsuitable, being neither sufficiently psychotropic to warrant the danger of profane usage nor appropriately revered as the secret drug. Rather, it was openly despised as a sign of the illicit union of man and woman in lustful concubinage without the sacrament of marriage. To just such an unsanctified abduction Demeter had lost her daughter at Nysa and accordingly we are told that the mother vented her displeasure by changing the prostitute of Hades into mint, thereupon grinding and bruising her botanic body. The final Eleusinian solution, on the other hand, will reconcile the mother to the daughter's loss through legitimatizing the nuptial abduction in the rite of matrimony, whereby an heir can accede to the dynastic house. Barley and not mint is the revelation at Eleusis, and it is to it that we must look for the sacred drug.

With the cultivation of grain, man had left his wild, nomadic ways and settled in cities, giving to the earth in order to receive back its harvest. All civilized institutions derived from this delicate accord struck with the dark, cold forces of death. Grain itself was thought to be a hybrid, carefully evolved from more primitive grasses. If not tended with proper care, it could be expected to revert to its worthless, inedible avatar. That primitive sibling to grain was thought to be the plant called *aira* in Greek, *Lolium temulentum* in botanical nomenclature, or commonly in English 'wild rye', darnel, cockle, ivray, or finally 'tares' in the Bible. This weed is usually infested with a fungoid growth, *Claviceps*

purpurea, ergot or rust, a reddening corruption to which barley was thought to be particularly susceptible. *Aira*, therefore, doubly endangered the cultivated staff of life, first as the renascent primordial grass and secondly as the host for the encroaching ergot infection. The revertive tendency of the infected grain, furthermore, was all too obvious, for when the sclerotia fell to the ground there grew from them not grain but tiny purple mushrooms, the fruiting bodies of the ergot fungus, clearly a return to the species of the unregenerate, wild Dionysian abductor.

Unlike the seedless mushroom, however, ergot would have seemed akin to the kernels of grain that were its host. As well as grain, therefore, it too was Demeter's plant, for she could wear its distinctive color as her robe or on her feet or be named with its epithet, Erysibe. The hallucinogenic properties of Claviceps were recognized in antiquity, and thus we may surmise that the parallel apostleships of the barley and the vine would have signified analogous transmutations wherein the chthonic spirits submitted to cultivation. Wine, however, was Dionysus' realm, the liquid that gave sleep like death and forgetfulness, whereas Demeter was the earth, dry with the harvest upon which man fed to live. Grain was her sacrament. Upon first coming to Eleusis, Demeter had refused the cup of wine and the initiates thereafter imitated her abstention in deference to the superior symbolism of the potion of barley.

Clearly ergot of barley is the likely psychotropic ingredient in the Eleusinian potion. Its seeming symbiotic relationship to the barley signified an appropriate expropriation and transmutation of the Dionysian spirit to which the grain, Demeter's daughter, was lost in the nuptial embrace with earth. Grain and ergot together, moreover, were joined in a bisexual union as siblings, bearing at the time of the maiden's loss already the potential for her own return and for the birth of the phalloid son that would grow from her body. A similar hermaphroditism occurs in the mythical traditions about the grotesquely fertile woman

whose obscene jests were said to have cheered Demeter from her grief just before she drank the potion.

This solution to the Mystery of Eleusis is made still more probable by a papyrus fragment that was brought to my attention by our translator of the Homeric hymn. The fragment preserves a portion of the *Demes*, a comedy by Eupolis written shortly after the scandal of the profanation of the Mystery in the fifth century B. C. It confirms that the profanation did indeed entail the drinking of the sacred *kykeon* and suggests that our identification of the drug it contained is correct. In the comedy, an informer explains to a judge how he had come upon someone who had obviously been drinking the potion since he had barley groats on his moustache. The accused had bribed the informer to say that it was simply porridge and not the potion that he had drunk. By a possible pun, the comedian may even indicate that the incriminating 'crumbs of barley' were 'purples of barley'.

Thus we may now venture past the forbidden gates and reconstruct the scene within the great initiation hall at Eleusis. The preparation of the potion was the central event. With elaborate pageantry, the hierophant, the priest who traced his descent back to the first performance of the Mystery, removed the sclerotia of ergot from the free-standing room constructed inside the *telesterion* over the remains of the original temple that had stood there in Mycenaean times. As he performed the service, he intoned ancient chants in a falsetto voice, for his role in the Mystery was asexual, a male who had sacrificed his gender to the Great Goddess. He conveyed the grain in chalices to the priestesses, who then danced throughout the hall, balancing the vessels and lamps upon their heads. The grain was next mixed with mint and water in urns, from which the sacred potion was then ladled into the special cups for the initiates to drink their share. Finally, in acknowledgment of their readiness, they all chanted that they had drunk the potion and had handled the secret objects that had come with them on the Sacred Road in sealed baskets. Then,

seated on the tiers of steps that lined the walls of the cavernous hall, in darkness they waited. From the potion they gradually entered into ecstasy. You must remember that this potion – an hallucinogen – under the right set and setting, disturbs man's inner ear and trips astonishing ventriloquistic effects. We can rest assured that the hierophants, with generations of experience, knew all the secrets of set and setting. I am sure that there was music, probably both vocal and instrumental, not loud but with authority, coming from hither and yon, now from the depths of the earth, now from outside, now a mere whisper infiltrating the ear, flitting from place to place unaccountably. The hierophants may well have known the art of releasing into the air various perfumes in succession, and they must have contrived the music for a crescendo of expectation, until suddenly the inner chamber was flung open and spirits of light entered the room, subdued lights I think, not blinding, and among them the spirit of Persephone with her new-born son just returned from Hades. She would arrive just as the hierophant raised his voice in ancient measures reserved for the Mystery: 'The Terrible Queen has given birth to her son, the Terrible One'. This divine birth of the Lord of the Nether World was accompanied by the bellowing roar of a gong-like instrument that outdid, for the ecstatic audience, the mightiest thunderclap, coming from the bowels of the earth.

Some Christian bishops, in the last days of the Mystery, thought they had discovered and could reveal the secret of Eleusis. One said that in this pagan rite there was materialized a stalk of barley. How true according to his limited lights, yet how utterly false. The Bishop had not known the night of nights at Eleusis. He was like one who has not known LSD or the mushrooms of Mexico or the morning-glory seeds. For close on to two thousand years a few of the ancient Greeks passed each year through the portals of Eleusis. There they celebrated the divine gift to mankind of the cultivated grain and they were also initiated into the awe-

some powers of the nether world through the purple dark of the grain's sibling that Dr Hofmann has once again made accessible to our generation. The myths of Demeter and Persephone and all their company fit our explanation in every respect. Nothing in any of them is incompatible with our thesis.

Until yesterday we knew of Eleusis only what little a few of the initiates told us but the spell of their words had held generations of mankind enthralled. Now, thanks to Dr Hofmann and Gordon Wasson, those of us who have experienced the superior hallucinogens may join the fellowship of the ancient initiates in a lasting bond of friendship, a friendship born of a shared experience of a reality deeper far than we had known before.

Chapter four

ANCILLARY DATA

A Greek scholar, writing just half a century ago, did not hesitate to dismiss the worship of Demeter at Eleusis as 'trivial and absurd; but,' he added, 'there can be no doubt that it did much to satisfy the emotional side of the religious instincts of the Greeks. Its modern analogue is perhaps the Salvation Army.' We trust that our own comparisons will be less bizarre than his. In our generation we enjoy the advantage of having rediscovered the hallucinogenic experience. Moreover, the value of interdisciplinary collaboration is that it gives us access to knowledge otherwise apt to be beyond the reach of scholars. Our joint effort has yielded a radical answer to our problem: it sets the stage for much reexamination of traditional opinions about the classical Greeks and their tragic literature in celebration of the god Dionysus.

The ancient testimony about Eleusis is unanimous and unambiguous. Eleusis was the supreme experience in an initiate's life. It was both physical and mystical: trembling, vertigo, cold sweat, and then a sight that made all previous seeing seem like blindness, a sense of awe and wonder at a brilliance that caused a profound silence since what had just been seen and felt could never be communicated: words are unequal to the task. Those symptoms are unmistakably the experience induced by an hallucinogen. To reach that conclusion, we have only to show that the rational Greeks, and indeed some of the most famous and intelligent amongst them, could experience and enter fully into such irrationality.

Eleusis was different from the convivial inebriation of friends at a *symposion* or the drunken *komos* revel at the festivals of drama. Eleusis was something for which even the maenadic ecstasy of the mountain women was only partial preparation. In their various ways, other Greek cults too enacted aspects of the ancient

communion practiced between gods and men, between the living and the dead, but it was at Eleusis alone that the experience occurred with overwhelming finality: here alone was the grand design fulfilled of the maiden resurrected with her son conceived in death, and of the ear of barley that like her had sprouted beneath the earth. By this resurrection was validated the continuance of all that a Greek held most dear, the civilized way of life that, beyond each city's constitution, was the Greek heritage, evolved out of aboriginal primitivism just as all life too came from the beneficent accord with the lord of death. Here indeed is a rich full-bodied myth, filled with contradictions like all the myths of an unlettered age, one saying this and another saying that and a third saying something else, but somehow in the end harmonizing into one whole, a myth that for the Greeks explained the beginning and the end of things.

Months of learning and rituals preceded the revelation on the Mystery night, each action programming in further detail the meaning and substance, the full ramifications of the vision that lay ahead. At last the initiates would sit on the steps in the initiation hall. It was all done now except for the finale. They had learned the secret version of the sacred myth, they had bathed in the sea, abstained from various tabu foods and drinks, sacrificed a pig, taken the long walk along the Sacred Way from Athens, and made the perilous crossing of the final division of water before their arrival at the city of their Eleusinian hosts. Outside the sanctuary walls, there was the night-long dance beside the Maiden's Well on the very ground that the goddess had visited. Then there was the fast and the momentous entrance into the forbidden territory past the cave that was an entrance to Hades and the rock where Demeter had sat in grief. In the initiation hall, there was the final ceremonial dance of the priestesses carrying the chalice of grain upon their heads as they mixed and distributed the sacred potion: fragrant *blechon*, the despised herb associated with the illicit nature of the abduction, immersed in

water to which was added a sprinkling of flour from barley grown in the Rarian plain. The barley's potential as the foodstuff for mankind depended upon keeping at bay the encroachment of the reddening corruption that would draw it back to its worthless avatar, the rust-infested weed. Like the *blechon*, the weed too was thus associated with primitivism and the ways of life before the institutions of society brought man to a higher mode of existence. Of these two plants the initiates drank and then paused expectant for redemption while the hierophant chanted the ancient words. Then, suddenly, there was light and the boundaries on this world burst their bounds as spiritual presences were felt in their midst and the hall was flooded with glowing mystery.

From beginning to end here there was a reenactment of a sacred drama in which the initiates as well as the officiants had their role to play, until at last they experienced as actors the ineffable, all of their senses and emotions being shot through with what would thereafter be forever the unspeakable.

As the initiates passed through the lengthy proceedings, they were admitted to many secrets, but the hierophants may well have withheld from them the Secret of Secrets: the sacred water of the potion had already soaked up in the right dosage from the immersed ergot what it contained of ergine and ergonovine, as we call them today. But the hierophants were certainly, through the centuries, seeking ways to improve their technique, their formulae. In the course of those two millennia may they not have discovered a kind of ergot that contains solely the hallucinogenic alkaloids such as has been found in modern times in ergot of *Paspalum distichum*? Indeed herbalists other than the hierophantic families may have shared in this discovery and it may have been their knowledge that prompted the rash of profanations in B. C. 415. The inside story of those events will never be known but that there was a story to tell is certain.

In unlettered cultures the knowledge of the herbalist – the knowledge of the properties of plants and their use – was every-

where a body of secret lore passed on by word of mouth from herbalist to apprentice and sometimes from one herbalist to another. The apprenticeship took years before one practiced on one's own, and one never stopped learning. There were questions of dosage, of side effects, of proper plant ingredients that became poisons when taken to excess. In Mexico Bernardino de Sahagún and Francisco Hernández were gifted Spaniards and they spent endless effort and time to take down from the Indians the virtues of various Mexican plants. But they were Europeans who knew not the American plant world, and in their European world they were certainly not what we would call botanists or herbalists. Their intentions were good but their ignorance was complete. What they have to tell us about the hallucinogens is childish. They could have tried the hallucinogens but elected not to do so, spurned the chance. What a different story they would have told us if they had lived for a number of years as apprentices of the Indian *sabios*.

In the Homeric hymn to Demeter, on arriving at Eleusis, tired and disconsolate over the loss of her daughter Persephone, Demeter was offered a drink of wine, which she declined. Since every act in this narrative had mythic meaning, it seems that drinking the alcoholic beverage did not go with the drinking of the divine potion called *kykeon*. The two kinds of inebriation were incompatible. In Mexico those who will take the mushrooms know that they must refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages for four days before the *velada*, as the mushroom celebration is called. Alcoholic inebriation would profane, would defile, the divine draught, alike in Mexico and Greece.

The Eleusinian Mysteries were in the exclusive hands of the Eumolpus and Kerykes families. For close to two thousand years, these hierophants governed with autocratic authority the rites at Eleusis. By contrast, in the sacred mushroom country of Mexico every village has its *sabios* ('wisemen') who are the custodians of the rite. (In some remote Mixe villages the individual families take

the mushrooms when they feel the need, without the guidance of a *sabio*. Whether this informal practice in the Mixe country marks a breakdown in the rite or the survival of an earlier archaic procedure, we do not know.) In Greece the 'initiate' took the potion only once in his life, and thus he could not compare successive experiencies. In Mexico one may consult the mushroom whenever a grave family problem presents itself. Some Indians choose never to take the mushroom, others only once, yet others intermittently. The newcomer to the experience is constantly warned that ingesting the hallucinogen is in the highest degree *delicado*, 'delicate' with a connotation of grave danger.

At Eleusis and in Mexico certain items of food were proscribed for some time before the big night. It is impossible to compare the dietary exclusions, so different are the foods, except that in both cases eggs are tabu. Fasting was practiced in Greece and also in Mexico, from the morning throughout the day: in both cases one faced the night on an empty stomach. In Mexico before the Conquest it was the practice in aristocratic circles to drink nourishing chocolate spiked with the inebriating mushrooms, in this way breaking the fast as the events of the night were launched on their course. Owing to the silence enjoined on everyone who had taken part in the Mystery, there are scarcely any hints as to what happened in the writers of the flourishing period of Eleusis, but in the early centuries of the Christian era, with Eleusis breaking down, we discover a few references, obscure, inhibited, that may permit us some uncertain glimpses. We find mention of a collation served to the initiates when a large cake called the *pelanos*, made of barley and wheat harvested in the adjacent sacred Rarian plain, was broken into pieces and the portions served to all. In the sources one hears of a bond of alliance and friendship that sprang up among the initiates, and some have suggested that this sprang from the collation they had shared together. It is not incompatible with the Greek texts to suppose that the collation paralleled the breaking of the fast in Mexico, the *pelanos* taking

the place of the chocolate. But surely the bond of alliance and friendship had nothing to do with the collation: nothing so jejune would have sufficed. The overwhelming effect of the night under the influence of an hallucinogen gives natural birth to a feeling of shared supernatural experience never to be forgotten, a feeling of *cofradía*, of brotherhood. Two of us have known this personally in Mexico: those who pass through a *velada*, in the right set and setting, live through an awesome experience, and feel welling up within them a tie that unites them with their companions of that night of nights that will last for as long as they live. Here we think is the bond of alliance and friendship of which the Greek sources speak obscurely.

Then there is the matter of secrecy. In Mexico nothing had been heard of the sacred mushrooms in sophisticated circles since the early friars mentioned them briefly in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It has been said that the mushrooms were a 'secret' of the Indians living in the highlands of southern Mexico. Our own little group flushed them out into the open. But we think this 'secret' was never really a secret. In the Indian communities everyone knew about them and also about the morning-glory seeds. Every villager could, if he wished, learn the art of recognizing the sacred mushrooms and many did so. There was a small trade in the mushrooms, supplying the demand among the natives who had moved to the cities and who still wished to 'consult' them. The Church had originally opposed them and the Holy Office of the Inquisition in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries tried to stamp out the native use of them by vigorous persecutions. They failed, of course, but the natural mycophobia of the Spanish population, their contempt for peculiar native practices, and the similar attitude of the French, the Germans, and the English who later came to know Mexico led naturally to an absence of communication between the natives and the occupying races on matters that lay closest to the Indians' hearts. It is small wonder that the sacred mushrooms, after an abortive

spate of notices, hopelessly inadequate, in the writings of the early friars, have remained unknown to the world to our own times. The Indians would not take the initiative in speaking about them. The 'secrecy' was not a conspiracy of silence: it was imposed on the Indians by the White Man, owing to the lack of intelligent and sympathetic curiosity in the élite of the White circles.

The secrecy in the ancient Greek world about the Eleusinian Mysteries was somewhat different. The laws of Athens made it a crime to speak about what went on at Eleusis in the telesterion. Toward the end of the Homeric hymn to Demeter, this silence is expressly enjoined on all initiates. In B. C. 415 there was a spate of deliberate profanations of the Mysteries by the jet set in Athens and a crackdown followed, harsh penalties being inflicted. But the secrecy ran far beyond the reach of the laws of Athens. That secrecy ruled everywhere in the Greek world and was never seriously violated. It too was self-enforcing. Those who knew the superior hallucinogens through personal experience were not inclined to discuss with outsiders what was revealed to them: words could not convey to strangers the wonders of that night and there would always be the danger that the effort to explain would be met with incredulity, with the scoffing and mockery that would seem to the initiate sacrilegious, would wound him in the very core of his being. One who has known the ineffable is loath to embark on explanations: words are useless.

So far as we can say, at every point what happened at Eleusis fits in with the hallucinogenic experience in Mexico but in one major respect the Mexican rite outdistances Eleusis. They both share in the great Vision ('Vision' embracing all the senses and the emotions), but in Mexico the sacred mushrooms (and the other superior hallucinogens) serve also as oracles. The hierophants of Eleusis saw a new crop of initiates every year and there were many initiates. With the limitations that this procedure imposed, they could not serve as consultants either to individuals or the State on grave problems where these would be needing advice.

In Mexico, on the other hand, the hallucinogen is consulted from time to time on all kinds of serious matters. The questions put to the mushrooms must be serious: if they are unworthy or frivolous, the suppliant is in for a sharp rebuff. Faith in the mushrooms among the Indians where traditional beliefs still prevail is absolute. When the suppliant has observed all the tabus, when the *velada* takes place under the right circumstances of darkness and silence, and when he poses his questions with a pure heart, the mushrooms will not lie. So say the Indians. And such meager evidence as one of us has suggests that they may be right.

Toward the end of the last century the world learned of peyotl and early in the middle of this century the hallucinogenic morning-glory seeds were identified by Richard Evans Schultes. A little later the sacred mushrooms of Mexico received their full meed of public attention, located and written up by Roger Heim and one of us. They were shown the way by a botanist, Blas Pablo Reko, and an anthropologist, Robert J. Weitlaner. Now the three of us are submitting to the modern world what well may be the key to the mystery of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The tie that binds the grain of Triptolemus to the supernal experience of Eleusis, easily and safely attainable from ergot, is so close and natural and poetically satisfying, complying point by point with the myth of Demeter and Persephone, that are we not virtually compelled to accept this solution?

Further avenues of inquiry open up. For example, the pregnant empresses of Byzantium lived in a porphyry-lined chamber so that their progeny would be born 'in the purple' ('porphyry' = purple). Was this 'purple' the color of *Claviceps purpurea* and do we have here a posthumous outcropping of the purple-robed Demeter and Hades-of-the-purple-hair? The earliest codices were written on purple vellum. Was this because only the most exalted color would be fitting, eg, for St. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei?* By a knee-jerk reflex the values of the Pagan world would thus live on under the Christian Dispensation.

Chapter five

THE HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER

Let me tell you the story of Demeter, the holy goddess whose hair grew in rich plaits as only a goddess's does, and of her daughter, whom Hades seized. Zeus, the thunder god, gave her to him. This is how it happened.

She was playing far from Demeter, lady of the harvest who reaps with a golden sickle, gathering flowers with the daughters of Ocean, roses and crocus and beautiful violets, iris, hyacinths, and the narcissus. Earth brought forth the narcissus as a wonderful lure for the blossoming girl according to Zeus's plan to please Hades, who receives all. It was an object of awe for all to see, both the immortal gods and mortal men. And from its root grew a hundred heads, smelling a smell so sweet that the whole broad sky above and all the earth laughed and the salty swell of the sea. The girl was amazed and stretched out both her hands to take the marvelous bauble. But as she did, the earth gaped open and Lord Hades, whom we all will meet, burst forth with his immortal horses into the Nysian plain. Lord Hades, the son of Cronus who is called by many names. Begging for pity and fighting him off, she was dragged into his golden chariot. She screamed the shrill cry of a maenad, calling father Zeus, Zeus the highest and the best. But none of the immortals nor any mortal man heard her voice, not even the olive trees that produce splendid fruit; only Hecate, who wears a delicate veil, Persaeus's kindly daughter, heard her from her cave – and Lord Helius, the brilliant son of Hyperion, he too heard the girl's cries to her father. But the son of Cronus was sitting far from the gods in his temple, a temple thronged with worshippers. And as he received sacrifice from mortal men, she was being carried off at his suggestion by his own brother, the one who rules over many and receives all – the son of Cronus who has many names, Hades, and his immortal horses.

As long as the maiden goddess could still see the earth and the starry skies, the sea that ebbs and the rays of the sun, she could still hope to join her beloved mother and the race of the gods who will always be. And that hope consoled her in her misery. The peaks of the mountains resounded with her immortal voice, and the depths of the sea, until at last her mother heard her cries. So bitter was the pain that seized the goddess's heart, that she tore from her head a gossamer veil, the veil that covered her divine hair, and threw over her shoulders a great black cloak, the mantle of death.

She flew swift as a bird over land and sea, seeking her daughter, but no one wanted to tell her the truth, no god nor any mortal man; nor did any bird come to her and we all know birds bear true messages. So for nine days, holy Deo roamed over the earth, carrying blazing torches in her hands, and so great was her grief that she refused the taste of ambrosia and sweet nectar and shunned the bath. But when dawn arrived bearing light for the tenth day, Hecate met her, holding a flame in her hand and bringing her a message – she told her this tale:

'Great Demeter, Goddess who brings in the seasons and gives splendid gifts, who of the heavenly gods or mortal men took Persephone and has broken your heart? I have come to you because I heard a cry, but I did not see with my own eyes who took her – here is all I know.'

So said Hecate, but the daughter of Rhea, Demeter whose hair grew in rich plaits as only a goddess's does, did not answer her with words; instead she swiftly flew with her, carrying blazing torches in her hands. They sped straight to Helius, the sun, watchman of the gods and of men, and standing in front of his horses, Demeter, goddess among goddesses, said:

'Helius, since we both are gods, you must help me, if ever in word or deed I warmed your heart and soul. I bore a daughter, a beautiful child with beautiful face, whose cries I heard through the uncharted skies, the cries of a captive – although I did not

see anything with my own eyes. But you, because you see everything beneath with your divine rays, everything on land and sea, you must tell me the truth. Did you see my child anywhere? Who has taken her from me against her will? Was it a god or some mortal man?'

She said that. And the son of Hyperion answered her by saying: 'Lady Demeter, daughter of Rhea whose hair grows in rich plaits as only a goddess's does, you will know the truth, since I stand in awe of you and pity you for how you suffer over the loss of your child. Zeus alone of the immortals is to blame, for he gave her to Hades, his own brother, to have for his wife. Seizing her, he led her to the sunless west, and her screams were shrill as a maenad's. But, Goddess, cease your great lament; you need not have such wrath: Aidoneus, the ruler of many, is your own brother and is not an unfitting husband among the immortals for your daughter. As for honor, he has his third of the world that he received when the realms were first apportioned and is the lord over those he received and with whom he dwells.'

When he had said this, he roused his horses and at his bidding they bore the swift chariot easily through the air like long-winged birds. Hearing him, Demeter's grief became anguish and her heart swelled with wrath. Angered with Zeus, the storm-black son of Cronus, she stayed away from the assembly of the gods and lofty Olympus and went in disguise for a long time to dwell with mortal men. No man who saw her knew her nor did any of the women who at that time wore their belts low over their hips, until she arrived at the house of the wise man Celeus, who was at that time the lord of Eleusis, where incense is always burning. She sat broken-hearted near the road at the Virgin's Well, where the women of the town drew water and where a dense olive tree grew giving shade. Sitting there, she looked like a woman long since a crone, who can bear no children nor enjoy the gifts of Aphrodite; such women are nurses for the children of kings, who administer justice, and they work as housekeepers through-

out their endless rooms. The daughters of Celeus, son of Eleusinus, saw her as they were bringing bronze jars of water to their father's house. There were four daughters, whose flowering beauty was such beauty as goddesses have: Callidice and Cleisidice, lovely Demo and Callithoe, who was the eldest of them all. They did not recognize the woman as Demeter, however, since it it is always difficult for the gods to be seen by mortals. But, standing near her, they said:

'Who are you, old woman? Why do you stay outside the town instead of approaching the city? There, in the shadowy halls, there are women as old as you – and younger ones as well – who will welcome you in word and deed.'

That's what they said and lady Demeter answered them:

'Dear children, bless you, whoever you are, you splendid girls. I shall tell you, for it would not be unseemly in speaking to girls such as you to tell the truth. My name is Dos, for that is the one my dear mother gave me. Now I have come from Crete upon the broad back of the sea, although I did not want to. Men, pirates they were, they took me away by force. Later, they put their swift ship in at Thoricus. There, a crowd of women came down to the sea and prepared a meal for us by the stern cables of our ship. But I had no desire for the pleasure of food. In secret stealing away through the dark land, I fled my vile captors so they might not sell me and have enjoyment of my price. Thus, I wandered about and now have come here – although I don't know just where I am nor who these people are who live here. But may all the gods on Olympus give you good husbands and may they grant that you bear as many children as you wish. Pity me, girls, . . .

[lacuna: and tell me (?)]

. . . dear children, to whose house I should go to find proper work, doing the sort of tasks old women do: to nurse a new-born child, holding him in my arms. I could also keep the house and make the lord's bed, the bed that lies deep within the well-built chambers, and I could teach the women their work.'

So the goddess spoke, and the unwedded virgin Callidice answered her, Callidice, the best-looking of the daughters of Celeus:

'Old Mother, poor mortals must endure what the gods dole out because they are much our betters. Ah, but let me explain it to you clearly and tell you the names of the men who are important, the ones honored in our town and who rule our people and guard the citadel, that sits like a crown upon our city – the ones who counsel us and keep our peace. There is Triptolemus, the wise, and Dioclus and Polyxenus, irreproachable Eumolpus and Dolichus and our own valorous father; and all of them have wives who keep their houses. And none of them on first seeing you would dishonor your person and send you away. Rather, they will welcome you because you are like some god. If you wish, stay here and we will go to our father's house to tell Metaneira, our mother Metaneira who wears her belt low over her hips – we will tell her everything from start to finish. And we will see if she wants you to come to our house rather than go seek some other. She has borne a son late in her life and is nursing him in her well-built chamber, a child most prayed for by us all. If you nurse and raise him and he reaches young manhood, then all women when they see you will envy you – so many will be the gifts she will pay you for rearing him.'

She said that and the goddess shook her head in assent. The maidens then filled their shining vessels with water and carried them home rejoicing. Quickly they arrived at their father's great mansion and quickly they told their mother what they had seen and heard. And she bade them go quickly to call the old woman and offer her a handsome wage. As deer or young heifers frolick in the meadows, sating themselves with the new shoots of springtime, thus the maidens as they held the folds of their gossamer robes rushed along the grooves of the wagon trail, their hair tossing about their shoulders like crocus blossoms, saffron and gold. They found the glorious goddess near the road, just where they had left her. Then they led her to their father's house and

she walked behind them with a heavy heart, draped from head to foot, and around the delicate feet of the goddess, her dark robe fluttered. Soon they arrived at the house of Celeus, whom god favors, and they went through the corridors until they reached their mother, lady Metaneira. She was sitting by a pillar and was holding her new offspring, her son, on her lap. The girls ran to their mother's side; then Demeter stepped to the threshold, her head grazing the roof beam – and the doorway was filled with her divine aura. Awe and reverence seized the mother and she grew pale from fear. She rose and begged the goddess to be seated on her own chair, but Demeter, the goddess who brings forth the seasons and gives us splendid gifts, did not choose to be seated on the glittering chair; rather, she stood in silence with her beautiful eyes cast down, until the scheming Iambe gave her a stool and threw a gleaming ram's fleece over it. Sitting there, she drew her veil across her face and for a long time sat grieving, speechless as she sat upon the stool. Nor did she say or do a thing; she just sat mirthless, with a taste for neither food nor drink, wasting away because of her desire for her daughter. Thus she remained until the scheming Iambe amused her with jokes and made the holy lady smile, then laugh, softening her heart – Iambe who in later times pleased her at her rites of Mystery. Metaneira offered her a cup filled with wine, as sweet as honey, but she refused it, telling her the red wine would be a sacrilege. She asked instead for barley and water to drink mixed with tender leaves of *glechon*. Metaneira made the potion and gave it to the goddess as she had asked; and great Deo received the potion as the precedent for the Mystery . . .

[lacuna of 22 to 26 lines]

. . . Metaneira, whose robe hung in thick folds about her hips, said to her:

'Greetings, woman, I do not think you are of low parentage, since modesty distinguishes your looks and grace, as if you were descended from a line of kings, who administer justice. But we

poor miserable mortals must suffer what the gods dole out and it seems a yoke of misfortune encircles your neck. Now since you have come here, what's mine shall be yours also. Nurse this child of mine: the gods granted him to me late in life when I had lost all hope of bearing him, and I prayed for him often. If you nurse him and he reaches young manhood, then all women when they see you will envy you – so many will be the gifts I shall pay for raising him.'

Demeter, the goddess who wears a splendid crown, then answered her:

'Greetings to you, woman, may the gods bless you with all that is good. I shall gently rear your child as you have bidden me. Have no fear for his safety, for he'll suckle the milk from no wicked nurse nor risk incantations that possess a babe nor will he taste of witches' root; for I know the powerful great herbs that are gathered and the talisman plant that wards off possession.'

So saying, she lifted him in her immortal hands and held him to her fragrant breast; and his mother rested content. Thus Demeter nursed the handsome son of wise Celeus, the son whom Metaneira bore, Metaneira whose robe hung in thick folds about her hips. The child flourished and grew like a god, for he fed not on mother's milk, but upon ambrosia, the food of gods, with which Demeter anointed him – anointed as if born a god himself; and she inspired him with her breath sweetly as she rocked him in her lap and at night she would bury him in the powers of the fire upon the hearth. But his parents knew none of this, and to them he was like a miracle, a kind of prodigy, somehow divine. The goddess would have made him ageless and immortal had it not been for the folly of Metaneira, his own mother. One night, watching from the sweet-smelling chamber, she spied upon the goddess at her magic and deranged by what she saw shrieked and beat her thighs in terror for her child. Horror-stricken she let forth this torrent of words:

'That woman, a guest in my house – dear Demophoon – she is

burying you in a great fire and she leaves it to me to mourn and bear the pain of grief.'

So she wailed in anguish and the goddess who is a goddess amongst goddesses heard her. Enraged with her folly, Demeter, whose crown is splendid, grabbed the child from the fire and threw him to the ground, the son Metaneira had borne, the one for whom she had lost all hope – and so furious was her heart that she said to Metaneira:

'All men are fools! They lack the sense to foresee their fate as it comes upon them, good or ill, whatever it be. You, because your head is witless, it is you who have caused this irreversible mistake. Let the oath of the gods be known, the oath that is sworn by the unassuaged deathless water of the River Styx: I would have made this son ageless for all of time and I would have granted him undying honor, but now he can never escape the demons that bring his death. Yet he has rested on my lap and slept in my arms, and for that he will always have undying honor: in remembrance of him, all in due course as the season returns, young Eleusinians will always join together in contest and battle again and again.

'I am Demeter, the one supreme in honor, for I am the source of life and joy both for mortals and immortals. This is what you must do. Have all your people build me a temple with an altar before it, beside the fortress of the high city that looms above Callichoron Well. And I myself shall institute my rites so that you may perform them and so conciliate my wrath.'

As she said that, the goddess was transformed, as if a wind had blown off her old age and left but her glorious beauty; her robes exhaled sweet perfumes, her skin radiated the aura of the immortals, and her golden hair covered her shoulders. The palace was filled with a brilliance such as the brilliance lightning gives. Then she turned and walked out of the hall.

When she had gone, Metaneira stood trembling and for a long time remained speechless, nor did she remember to pick up her

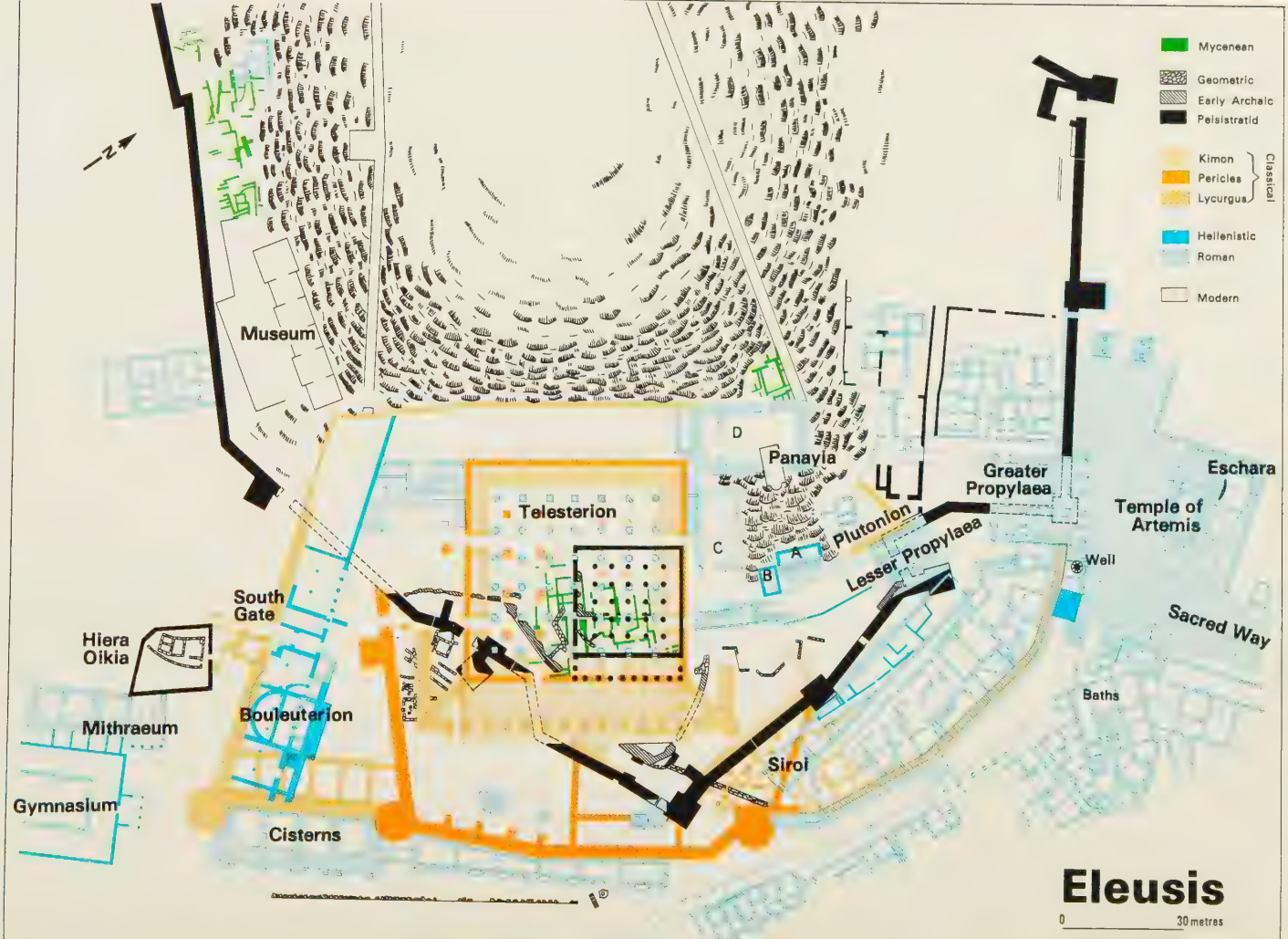
1. Golden stalks of wheat. Examples of the goldsmith's art found occasionally in ancient Greece.

2. *Ergot of Barley*
Sclerotium of *Claviceps purpurea* growing on barley (life size)

3. *Ergot of Wheat*
Sclerotium of *Claviceps purpurea* growing on wheat (life size)

4. *Ergot of Lolium*
Sclerotium of *Claviceps purpurea* growing on Lolium=darnel, cockle, 'wild rye', ivray, 'tares' in the Bible (life size)

5. *Ergot of Paspalum*
Sclerotium of *Claviceps paspali* growing on *Paspalum distichum* (life size × 2)



6. Diachronic map of the excavated remains of the Eleusinian sanctuary.

7. Model of the Eleusinian sanctuary during the Roman Period: the telesterion, with lantern and Portico of Philon, viewed from beyond the fortification wall; to the right, the Greater Propylaea and the Lesser Propylaea, with caryatids, through which the Sacred Road ascends toward the side entrances to the telesterion

8. The Sacred Marriage: Perseus and Medusa, who has 'lost her head.' Note mushrooms in upper left.

9. Fruiting Bodies of *Claviceps purpurea* × 2. In antiquity purple is linked with the awesome powers of the underworld, and Lord Hades is given purple hair in the Homeric hymn to Demeter *l* 347. Three times toward the end of the hymn, *ll* 360, 374, 443, we are told that Demeter's robe is 'purple dark'. In antiquity 'purple' meant crimson.

10. *Lekythos* showing a crowned Triptolemus with his queen, Persephone or Demeter: the Eleusinian grain and the poured libation interrupt the line that separates the two figures into different realms.

beloved child from the floor. But his sisters heard his pitiful cries and rushed from their beds, beds that were strewn with rich coverings. Then one of them picked up the child and laid him on her lap. One rekindled the fire, while another raised up her mother and hurried her out of the fragrant room upon her delicate feet. Next they bathed the trembling child, fondling him, hoping to calm him after what had just happened, but he could not be assuaged – no matter how well they nursed him, they could not compare with Demeter.

All night long they propitiated the glorious goddess as they trembled in fear and when dawn appeared they told the whole truth to powerful Celeus, as the goddess had commanded them, Demeter, whose crown is splendid. Then Celeus called his many subjects to an assembly and commanded them to build an opulent temple for Demeter, whose hair grew in rich plaits as only a goddess's does, and he told them to build an altar on the rising hill. And as soon as they heard his voice, they obeyed him and built the temple as he had bid them. And the temple grew under her help.

When they finished the temple and had stopped working, they went home, each to his own house. But golden-haired Demeter remained there sitting apart from all the blessed gods, wasting away with longing for her daughter, Persephone whose robe hung in thick folds about her hips. Then she made a deadly year for mankind, withering the soil that is so nourishing, and Earth would not send up seeds because Demeter, the goddess who wears a splendid crown, kept them hidden. In vain the oxen pulled the curved plowshare through the fields, and much white barley fell to the earth, where it was wasted. And now she would have destroyed the whole race of mortal men by famine and robbed the gods of their honors and sacrifices, the gods who have Olympus for their home, had not Zeus perceived this and pondered it in his heart.

First he sent Iris, who flies on wings of gold, to call upon De-

meter, whose hair grew in rich plaits as only a goddess's does and whose face glows with beauty. That was his decision and Iris obeyed Zeus, the storm-black son of Cronus. Swiftly she cut through the sky and arrived at the city of Eleusis, where incense perfumes the air. She found Demeter in her temple wearing the dark robes of a mourner, and she spoke this flutter of words:

'Demeter, father Zeus calls you to come rejoin the undying race of the gods who will always be. Come now, don't let my message from Zeus go unheeded.'

That's what she said, imploring her, but Demeter's mind could not be changed. Then father Zeus sent out all the blessed gods and one by one they went to her and called upon her and gave her many splendid gifts and let her choose as much honor as she might want among the immortals. But no one could persuade her to change her mind since she was so angered, and she stubbornly ignored their pleas. She said she would never again set foot on fragrant Olympus or let the earth bear fruit unless she saw her beautiful daughter with her own eyes.

Finally Zeus heard this, Zeus the thunder god, and he sent Hermes, who carries a golden wand, into Erebus, Hermes whom they call the Argus-killer because he slew that hundred-eyed monster, and now Zeus sent him that he might exhort Hades with soft words to let him lead holy Persephone out of the sunless west into the light. Then her mother would see her with her own eyes and seeing her, change her temper.

So, leaving the seat of Olympus, Hermes obeyed and rushed through the hollows of the earth. He found the lord of the dead seated in his house on a couch with his awesome wife, but it was not her will that kept her seated there since all she could will was her mother. But her mother was far away, thinking over what the gods had done. Standing nearby, the mighty slayer of Argus addressed him:

'Lord of Death, you Hades whose hair is purple, father Zeus commanded me to lead glorious Persephone out of Erebus back to

us gods so that her mother, when she sees her with her own eyes, will stop her wrath and her horrible anger against the immortals – because she is planning a great act of vengeance: she is going to destroy the feeble race of mortals who dwell on the earth; this will she do by keeping the seeds hidden underground and so will she cause the honors that are paid to the gods to perish. She has a furious wrath and won't mingle with the gods; instead she sits apart from us in her fragrant temple, which is scented with incense, and she holds as her domain now the rocky citadel of Eleusis.'

He said that and the lord of the dead, Aidoneus, smiled and raised his eyebrows nor did he disobey the command of Zeus the king. Hurrying, he gave these commands to Persephone, the queen of miracles:

'Go, Persephone, to your mother, the lady who wears deep-purple robes, and have a kindly spirit in your breast and be not so despondent. I will not make so bad a husband for you amongst the immortals – after all, I am Zeus's own brother. When you are there in his realm, you will rule over all the plants that grow and all moving creatures. Yours will be the greatest honor amongst all immortals and anyone who fails to make sacrifices to you and does not perform your rites or forgets to offer you appropriate gifts will learn the consequences.'

He said that and Persephone rejoiced and quickly jumped up from her throne in glee. But he, himself, gave her in secret a sweet pomegranate seed to eat so that she might not remain forever with her mother, the awesome Demeter whose robe is a deep purple. Then Aidoneus, who rules over many, harnessed his immortal horses to a golden chariot. Persephone got into the chariot and beside her sat the mighty slayer of Argus, Hermes, who held the reins and a whip in his hands. And they sped through the hall with horses eager to fly. Quickly they made the long journey back and neither the sea nor the waters of the rivers could hinder the flight of such immortal horses, no, nor even the grassy valleys

nor the mountain tops, but always onwards did they cut through the air over the very mountain tops like a ship through the deep ocean. And then Hermes stopped them where Demeter was waiting in front of her temple perfumed with incense; and when she saw her daughter, she ran to her as a maenad racing through a mountain wood runs.

[387-405 badly mutilated; restoration uncertain]

And Persephone, for her part, when she saw her mother's beautiful eyes, leapt from the chariot and fell on her knees, covering her mother with embraces. But while Demeter still was caressing her child and holding her in her arms, she thought with horror – a trap – and trembling with her fear, she stopped fondling her beloved daughter and spoke these words:

'My child, when you were below the earth, did you eat any food? Tell me the truth and don't hide anything from me, so that we both may know. Because if you didn't accept his hospitality, you can flee from the halls of that loathsome Hades and dwell with me and your father, the storm-black son of Cronus, where you will be honored by all the immortals. But if you did eat anything, you will have to make the journey back again to the depths of the earth and live with Hades for a third part of the seasons of the year and stay here with me and the other immortals for only two of the three. When the earth abounds with all the fragrant blossoms that come with Spring, then from the sunless west out of the dark night you'll rise and appear as a great miracle to the gods and mortal men. . . . [lacuna] . . . And with what trick did the god who receives all deceive you?'

Persephone, most beautiful, answered her:

'I will tell you everything just as it truly happened, Mother. When Hermes came to me, Hermes the helper and swift messenger of the gods – when he came, beseeched by my father Zeus, son of Cronus, and by all the other gods who live on Olympus – when he came to lead me out of Erebus so that you could see me with your own eyes, he came so that you would cease your wrath

with the immortals and calm your terrible anger. So he came and I jumped up for joy, but he – Hades – forced upon me a pomegranate seed, forced it upon me against my will so that I would eat it – and I did eat of that sweet fruit.

'And I'll also tell how he seized me according to the plan of my father, the son of Cronus, and brought me into the hollows of the earth. I'll tell you all this, everything you have asked.

'All of us were playing in a lush meadow, my friends and I – Leucippe and Phaino, Electra and Ianthe – and I was playing with Melite, Iache, Rhodeia and Callirhoe, Melobosis and Tyche, and also with Ocyrhoe, who is as beautiful as a flower herself. There were also Chryseis, Ianeira, Acaste and Admete, Rhodope, Pluto and Calypso, whom all men desire. And with us were Styx and Urania, lovely Galaxaura and Pallas, who spurs on battles, and Artemis, the archer. Thus we all played, all virgins and full-bloomed in youth: we gathered the blossoms of earth in our hands, flower gathering flower – bouquets of gentle crocus, iris and hyacinth, rose buds and lilies, gorgeous to see. And there was a narcissus – the wide earth had brought it forth, glorious as a crocus, a jewel – and in ecstasy I spied it and plucked it, but the earth gave way beneath and from her burst the great lord Hades, who receives many. In his golden chariot, he carried me beneath the earth and I struggled all unwilling, screaming shrill a lament.

'Wretched though it makes me, I have told you the whole truth.'

Thus they were in harmony with each other and for the whole day they comforted one another and their embraces finally softened their grief, each receiving and giving joy. Then to them came Hecate, who wears a delicate veil and she also caressed the daughter of holy Demeter and from that time on, lady Hecate was the servant and companion of Persephone.

Zeus, the thunder god, sent a messenger to them, Rhea whose hair grew in rich plaits as only a goddess's does, and she was sent to lead back Demeter, whose robes are purple dark, to the race of

the gods. Then Zeus promised to give her whatever honors she wanted from the immortal gods. And he consented to the plan that the girl spend a third part of each spiralling year in the dark where the sun goes down, but that two-thirds would be spent with her mother and the other immortals. That's what he said, and the goddess did not disobey Zeus's message. Swiftly she fled down from the peaks of Olympus and sped to the Rarian plain.

Formerly this plain was the richest of fields that give life, but at this time it gave no life at all, lying waste, barren and all leafless. And the white barley was hidden in the earth by Demeter's plan. But in a little while, as the springtime progressed, it would be waving long ears of grain like a mane in the wind and its fertile furrows would be filled with grain lying at harvest, while other ears would be bound in sheaves. It was in that field that she alighted first out of the uncharted sky. When the goddesses saw each other, they embraced and rejoiced in their hearts. Then Rhea, who wore a delicate veil, said:

[462-70: text damaged; reconstruction uncertain]

'Come, my child, Zeus the thunder god calls you to come rejoin the race of the gods and he promised whatever honors you might want from the other immortals. He agreed that your daughter spend a third part of each spiralling year in the dark where the sun goes down and the other two-thirds with you and the other immortals. That's what he said was to be and he nodded his head in assent. So come, child, and obey, and persist not in fighting with the stormy son of Cronus, but once again give the earth's fruit to mankind.'

That's what she said. And she was not disobeyed, for as soon as she had finished speaking, Demeter made fruits spring up from the rich plowlands, and the whole wide world became heavy with leaves and flowers. Then she went forth to the kings who administer justice, Triptolemus and Diocles, who drives horses, and mighty Eumolpus and Celeus, the leader of his people. To them, she showed the performance of her rites and taught her Mysteries

– holy rites that are awesome, that no one may transgress nor reveal nor express in words, for an overwhelming reverence for the gods stops his voice. Whoever among men who walk the earth has seen these Mysteries is blessed, but whoever is uninitiated and has not received his share of the rite, he will not have the same lot as the others, once he is dead and dwells in the mould where the sun goes down.

And when the goddess among goddesses had taught them everything, she went to Olympus to be in the company of the other gods. There the two goddesses live with Zeus, who delights in the thunderbolt, and they are holy and revered.

Whomever the goddesses love among men who walk the earth, he is blessed, for they soon send Plutus into his great house to live at his own hearth, Plutus who gives wealth to mortal men.

But come now, you goddesses who preside over the town of Eleusis, where incense perfumes the air – you two who also have domains on Paros, which the sea surrounds, and in mountainous Antron – you lady Deo who brings in the seasons and gives splendid gifts, you and your beautiful daughter Persephone, come now grant me an easy life for my song. And still again may I pray to sing you a song.

Translation by Danny Staples

Chapter six

DOCUMENTATION

VISION AT ELEUSIS

There is nothing sacred today about the Sacred Road except its name. It leaves what was once the ancient city of Athens amidst ramshackle shops and industrial buildings, passing through dismal suburbs as it slowly rises toward the low ridge on the barren mountain that encloses the western limit of the Attic plain. On the crest, the ancient traveller would pause to rest in a grove of laurel trees sacred to Apollo. It is they that still give their name to the place, but long ago a Christian monastery was built there to obliterate the memory of the pagan traveller and the surrounding pine forest is now the site for the annual Daphni Wine Festival. From the ridge, the road descended into the fertile Rarian plain, where grain was said to have been first planted. Today, the plain is the most highly industrialized area in Greece and although the road follows its original path along the shore, the narrow bay of Salamis, where the Athenians once defeated the vastly superior Persian fleet, is now congested with tankers riding at anchor, unloading petroleum to the clusters of storage facilities. The trip to Eleusis used to be mimetic of a journey to the other world to claim back from death the daughter of the grain mother Demeter, whose sorrow for her lost maiden could be assuaged only through the mystery of rebirth. A traveller on the modern highway is apt not even to notice the brackish streams that were thought to flow from a subterranean source and that once formed the boundary between the two realms.[1] A man named Krokon (Crocon) was said to have been the first to dwell on the other side as husband to the Eleusinian Saesara, a name

1. Pausanias 1. 38. 1-2.

that was an epithet for the terrible queen amongst the dead. Appropriately, only the priesthood had the prerogative of fishing in those waters, for it was they, the inheritors of that office, who regulated the transfer from life to death, a passage which the Eleusinian faith viewed as a metaphysical union between lovers across a division of water. At Eleusis itself, the religion toward which the ancient traveller made his way was shielded from profane observance by the sanctuary's fortification wall, and the essential dogma was imparted only to those who, under pain of death, had vowed to keep it secret and had undergone a lengthy preparation for their initiation. Although the walls have fallen into ruins and the modern tourist can freely intrude upon the prohibited ground, the secret is no longer there. A century of archaeological excavation has succeeded only in clearing the debris from a sanctuary that was destroyed not by time alone, but by the bitter hatred of a rival faith, for the Mystery of Eleusis had competed too well with the newer religion and finally in its fourth century into the Christian era it had forcibly been brought to an end after almost two millennia, during most of which time it had been the primary spiritual consolation for all Hellenized mankind.

The desecrated sanctuary has lost its numinosity, all its gods long since dead or chased away. But in Athens, some twenty feet lower than the modern city, we can still stand on a portion of the Sacred Road where it first left the city gate, passing through the monuments of the ancient cemetery. From this excavation, the intervening city disappears and we can look up across the centuries directly to the Acropolis. In the swampy ground that lies along the road, reeds grow and flower profusely and amidst the croaking of frogs, we can almost expect still to hear the exultant cries of the initiates as they set out for Eleusis, calling upon Iakchos (Iacchus), as in the Eleusinian chorus of Aristophanes' *Frogs*. It was this Iakchos who would lead them to the Mystery. In a chorus of Euripides' *Ion*, we also catch something of the ancient exulta-

tion.[1] There, they speak of the holy sixth night, when the initiates at last would arrive at the sacred well beside the sanctuary gate at Eleusis. Here they would sing and dance without sleep throughout the night in honor of Dionysus and of the sacred mother and daughter, who were Demeter and Persephone. And with them in their dance would dance also the starry sky and the moon and all fifty of the daughters of Ocean, rising out of rivers and from the sea.

The hallucinatory nature of that dancing universe was the prelude to what would be seen once the initiates passed within the sanctuary's wall; for there, huddled in the darkness within the initiation hall, they saw something that validated the continuity of existence beyond the grave, the 'end of life as well as its divinely granted beginning,' as the poet Pindar wrote.[2] And indeed, this is what has been such a dilemma about Eleusis, for something must have been seen there. All our ancient testimony insists upon that fact, authors like the poet of the Homeric hymn to Demeter and the tragedians Sophocles and Euripides.[3] To have seen the holy, *ta hiera*: it was in that way that one could speak safely of the Mystery.[4] Up to that moment, the initiate was a *mystes*, with his eyes closed to the world;[5] he came to that state through the preparatory initiation of the Lesser Mystery at Agrai.[6] But at

1. Euripides, *Ion* 1074 ff. 2. Pindar, frg. 121 (Bowra). 3. Homeric hymn to Demeter (2) 476-82; Pindar, frg. 121; Sophocles, frg. 837 (Pearson); Euripides, *Hippolytus* 25. 4. Andocides, *On the Mysteries* 31. 5. Cf. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg 1961-70), who derives *mystes* from *myo*, a verb meaning 'to close' as the eyes for slumber; a *mystes* is 'one who closes his eyes.' Others have derived the word from the idea of 'closing the lips' or 'binding to silence.' It is perhaps apposite to note that Sophocles' Oedipus has lost his mortal eyesight to gain a deeper insight as the preliminary to the final termination to his life with its strong Eleusinian connotations. 6. C. Kerenyi, *Eleusis: Archetypal Image of Mother and Daughter* (New York, Bollingen Series no. LXV 4 1967, translated from the German manuscript revised by the author from publications in 1960 and 1962). Kerenyi is right in noting that the ancient sources repeatedly use the term *mystai* for the candidates for the Greater Mystery; they would not have done this if the *mystai* became *mystai* only after the greater initiation. Mylonas (G. Mylonas, *Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, Princeton, New Jersey 1961) mistakenly argued that the candidate became a *mystes* at Eleusis. Mylonas is thus

Eleusis, one had the vision, the *epopteia*, and became someone who had seen, an *epoptes*. Yet archaeologists have not found the holy, *ta hiera*, at Eleusis, although they did actually expect that they would; and in the absence of any excavated object, scholars have been free to fantasize whatever they wanted these mysterious *hiera* to be: relics, according to some, from the Mycenaean past or phallic symbols or perhaps the *kteis*, the so-called *pudenda muliebria*. These holy things were supposedly stored in a small building or free-standing chamber within the initiation hall; at the moment of the revelation, the hierophant opened a door on it and in the midst of a great light showed *ta hiera*.[1]

This indeed he must have done, but few initiates could have seen him, for the *telesterion* or initiation hall, as it now appears from archaeological excavation, was not a theater and was in other ways completely unsuitable for displaying the hierophant's activity. The building was rebuilt and enlarged at various times to accommodate the increasing numbers of initiates, but in all the modifications, an essential design was maintained: the *telesterion* was a rectilinear building built around a much smaller rectangular chamber, the *anaktoron* or 'lord's dwelling.' In the later *telesterion*, at least, the roof above this *anaktoron* was constructed as a 'lantern,' admitting the only light from outside and affording ventilation for torches and fires. The topographical position of the *anaktoron* was kept virtually constant throughout the reconstructions, built always on the site of the most ancient Mycenaean original. Its relative placement within the *telesterion*, however, varied from period to period. On one of its sides, the *anaktoron* had a door, beside which was the high-backed and roofed throne of the hierophant, affording him protection from the great fire

forced to assume that some few of them later went on to become *epoptai* through a second degree of initiation at Eleusis. There is no evidence for such a second initiation.
1. Plutarch, *Themistocles* 15; *De Profectu in Virtute* 81 d-e; Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 5. 8. 40; cf. the light that fills Metaneira's palace at Eleusis when Demeter enters: Homeric hymn 2. 189.

within the *anaktoron*. The interior perimeter of the *telesterion* consisted of several steps leading up to the wall. Here the initiates presumably would sit or stand, with others perhaps also on the main floor of the hall. The line of view obviously was obstructed from many angles. With the forest of columns that supported the roof, and the high back on the hierophant's throne, and the sacred chamber itself all blocking the view, many candidates within the hall would have found it impossible to see what the hierophant did at the moment of the 'vision.'

The *hiera*, moreover, seem to have been remarkably transportable, for although they ordinarily resided within the chamber and were let out of the sanctuary for processions only hidden in closed hampers, Alcibiades was able to show them profanely to a group of friends at his house in Athens.[1] Although the profanation was a great scandal, no one ever thought of accusing the priesthood of complicity in allowing the *hiera* out of the sanctuary. Actually, were it not that all our sources insist upon a vision at Eleusis, Greek scholars would have had no difficulty in recognizing that the *hiera* need not have referred to specific objects, but to the whole realm of the holy, the experience and the ceremony of religion.[2]

Heracles was said to have been more precise about what was seen. It was Persephone herself. In a papyrus fragment, he claims that he had no need of the initiation because he had already seen her when he descended into Hades.[3] According to Euripides, it was this vision that allowed him to triumph over death and to return like her from the other world.[4] Here too, we must remember that the initiation hall was not a theater. No money is recorded in the account books for expenditures on theatrical

1. Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 19. 2. Cf. the use of the phrase *ta hiera* in Demosthenes ('Against Neaera') 59. 77 ff. 3. *Papiri della Reale Università di Milano*, vol. 1, ed. A. Vogliano, (Milan 1937) 177. Cf. W. Otto, 'The Meaning of the Eleusinian Mystery,' *The Mysteries* (New York, Bollingen Series no. xxx 2 1955, papers selected from the *Eranos-Jahrbücher*) 14-31. The same tradition about Heracles' seeing Persephone in Hades is preserved in Apollodorus 2. 5. 12. 4. Euripides, *Heracles* 613.

equipment or actors at Eleusis. Nor is it likely that the Greeks, who were so sophisticated about drama, would have fallen for some trick of stagecraft. It was not an actor but Persephone who was seen, a *schema ti*, a form or appearance of some kind hovering above the ground, as one source claimed.[1] Plato more explicitly called them *phasmata* or ghostly apparitions.[2] The initiation hall became filled with spirits, as Pausanias records in telling us about someone who intruded upon the ceremony and subsequently died.[3] It was no doubt the common expectation of such events at Eleusis that was responsible for the many witnesses who claimed to have seen a cloud of dust rising above the Sacred Road and to have heard the Iakchos cries when the spirits alone performed the Mystery because all the Athenians had fled before the invading Persian army.[4]

Clearly an hallucinatory reality was induced within the initiation hall and since at times as many as three thousand initiates, a number greater than the population of an ordinary ancient town,[5] were afforded such a vision annually on schedule, it would seem obvious that some psychotropic drug was involved. As the Christian Clement contemptuously reveals to us, the *hiera* in the mystic hampers were actually only foods of various kinds.[6] Thus Alcibiades and the others who were convicted of the profanations of the year 415 B. C. would, of course, have had no difficulty in acquiring *hiera* for their secular parties, for these profanations, it was discovered, had occurred repeatedly in social contexts, with groups of inebriated friends[7] at dinner gatherings[8] in some of the

1. Sopater 339. 25 (C. Walz, *Rhetores Graeci* VIII, p. 123), with Lenormant's correction. 2. Plato, *Phaedrus* 250 c. That Plato is contrasting his version of mystical vision to that of Eleusis is assured by his use in this context of the words for the two levels of initiation, *myesis* and *epopteia*. 3. Pausanias 10. 32. 17. 4. Herodotus 8. 65. 5. Aristides, *Panathenaic Oration* 373. 6. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus* 2. 18. 7. Plutarch, *Alcibiades* 19; Lysias, *Against Andocides* 51. 8. Isocrates 1616; cf. Pherecrates' comedy, *The Kitchen or All Night Dinner Party*, which parodied events at the house of Pulytion, where one of the more notorious profanations occurred: cf. D. MacDowell, commentary on Andocides' *On the Mysteries* (Oxford 1962) appendix N.

city's most aristocratic houses. And indeed, we do know that the drinking of a special potion, the *kykeon*, was an essential part of the Mystery.[1] The ingredients for this drink are recorded in the Homeric hymn to Demeter: barley (*alphi*), water, and mint or *glechon*.[2] Watkins has shown that the procedures and ingredients for the preparation of such magical or ritual potions in Greek show exact formulaic correspondences with the Vedic Soma ritual and he concludes that these correspondences cannot be coincidental but must instead indicate that the Greek pattern reflects the ritual drink of the Indo-Iranian religion. That drink is hallucinogenic, a mixed potion that is always prepared by a woman or marked as female by the inclusion of milk and always placed in a special vessel to be drunk by participants who are seated.[3] In terms of these correspondences in formulae, it is interesting to note that priestesses performed the ceremony of mixing the sacred potion and that the initiation hall at Eleusis provides seating space for the initiates on the tiers of steps that line the interior walls.

A special vessel, moreover, was associated with the drinking of the *kykeon*. Unfortunately the name of that vessel is not recorded in the hymn to Demeter since a lacuna of some 22 to 26 lines, caused by a flaw in the original manuscript,[4] occurs just at the moment that Demeter receives the potion. In an Orphic hymn,[5] where the *kykeon* is served by Baubo instead of Iambe, the vessel is named as an *angos*, generically a 'vessel' or 'bowl,' to which is added an epithet that might suggest that it was made of metal. Several such vessels occur in Eleusinian decorations, where they appear to serve as the very emblem of the Mystery. The ves-

1. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus* 2. 18. 2. Homeric hymn 2. 206-11. 3. C. Watkins, a paper read in 1977 before groups of linguists at Yale and Oxford: Watkins compares Circe's potion (Homer, *Odyssey* 10. 233 ff., 314 ff.), Demeter's *kykeon* (Homeric hymn 2. 210), and Nestor's drink (Homer, *Iliad* 11. 634 ff.). 4. Cf. N. J. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Oxford 1974) 66. 5. Orphic hymn, frg. 52 (Kern).

sel, as can be seen from the Eleusinian Caryatid, was an elegant, two-handled cup upon a stem and had a cover or lid; ears of grain were sometimes inserted into the handles as an indication of the potion's symbolism, and the lid was sealed with string or ribbon, apparently to secure the lid during transport, for the vessel is sometimes shown being balanced by women upon their heads.[1] We may surmise with considerable certainty that it was from such a vessel that the initiate drank the potion. Since the vessel seems to have been carried to the Mystery, it is probable that the initiate must have provided his own utensil, perhaps retaining it as a memento of the occasion, for otherwise they would have been found in greater numbers in the excavations at Eleusis.

The mixing of the potion was part of the ceremony performed after the initiates had entered the initiation hall. There, another vessel, the *kernos*, was involved; its shape and symbolism help us recapture the meaning of the ritual and the potion. Its name appears to derive from pre-Greek times[2] and it was used in the worship of the Great Goddess Rhea, who was the mother of Zeus.[3] The *kerchnos* was probably the same vessel,[4] named from the manner of its manufacture by 'roughening' or embossing metal;[5] it was, furthermore, associated with grains, for the *kerchnos* is sometimes glossed as equivalent to *kegchos*, 'granule,' 'grain seed,' or 'millet.'[6] We find mention of such golden *kerchnoi* in the records of the treasure stored in the Eleusinion at Athens,[7] and quite a few examples of *kerna* (plural of *kernos*) have been found at Eleusis. These *kerna* consist of a central bowl surrounded by many immovably attached smaller cups, that were supposed to contain an array of plant and animal produce (or more precisely: sage, white poppy-seeds, grains of wheat and barley, peas, vetches, okra-seeds, lentils, beans, rice, oats, dried fruit, honey, oil, wine, milk,

1. Niinion's tablet, Athens National Archaeological Museum. 2. Cf. Frisk, *Griech. Etymol. Wört.* 3. Scholia to Nicander, *Alexipharmaca* 7-8, 217. 4. *Inscriptiones Graecae* I² 313, 17314. 5. Cf. Kerenyi, *Eleusis*, appendix 2. 6. Anaxandrides 41. 27; Galen 18 (1). 574; Hesychius. 7. *IG* I² 313, 31423.

11. Caryatid from the lesser (inner) Propylaea, carrying the sacred *kiste* decorated with the Eleusinian vessel.

12. *Kernos* vessel for the Eleusinian ceremony.

egg, and natural wool).[1] These contents, however, must have had a symbolic meaning with regard to the substance contained in the central bowl, for some extant versions of the *kernos* have the peripheral cups reduced to a mere design, incapable of holding anything. It was the contents of the central bowl that was important, and the *kernos* presented that substance as some kind of culmination to the plant and animal worlds. The shape of the *kernos*, moreover, makes it ungainly as a drinking vessel, and it was apparently the chalice containing some important ingredient for the mixing ceremony.

During the initiation, the hierophant removed the *kernos* (or *kerna*) from the shrine or tabernacle, conveying the vessel to the so-called '*kernos*-bearers,' who were the priestesses who danced with the vessel balanced upon their heads, apparently with lamps lighted in some of the peripheral cups,[2] at least in those cases where the *kernos* is suitably constructed. Apparently, these women then presided over the actual mixing of the *kykeon* in vessels called *kernoi*, presumably larger ones, suited for the preparation of the great quantity of potion that would be required to fill the many vessels from which the initiates then drank. The intoxicating nature of that drink is indicated by the fact that both the *kerna* and the *kernoi* were called '*krateres* (or mixing bowls) for the Mystery':[3] the *krater* was ordinarily used for the ceremonial mixing of wine, a drink that was prohibited at Eleusis; but it would be the expectable term to describe the utensil for mixing other drinks also, especially if the drink like wine was an inebriant.

Polemon, a philosopher of the Christian era, described how the hierophant officiated at such an Eleusinian communion. 'Next,' he wrote, 'the hierophant performs the initiation and he takes the things from the chamber and distributes them to all the ones who will carry the *kernos* around (in the dancing) . . . Then, raising his

1. Polemon's treatise on the 'Sacred Fleece of Zeus,' quoted in Athenaeus 11. 476 e-f, 478 c-d. 2. Pollux 4. 103. 3. Scholium to Nicander, *Alexipharmaca* 217.

kernos aloft like the person who carries the *liknon* or winnowing basket, he tastes those things.'[1]

Thus the hierophant began the drinking; the initiates then followed his example, waiting, as they listened to his chanting in the darkened *telesterion*, for the moment of revelation – a vision unmistakably induced by what had been drunk, for it was accompanied by such symptoms of the drug experience as a cold sweating and a sense of vertigo.[2] The meaning of that experience had been rehearsed by months of rituals. At Eleusis the final indoctrination had involved the manipulation of the sacred objects enclosed in the *kistai*, the sealed hampers of the Mystery that had come with them along the Sacred Way to Eleusis. Here too we glimpse a symbolism like that of the array of objects in the cups of the *kernos*, testifying to a complex structuring of the botanic and animate realms that would result from the performance of the Mystery: for these *kistai*, we are told, contained sacred cakes of different shapes and meanings, balls of salt, pomegranates, poppies, fig branches, a serpent, the *thyrsos*, characteristic objects from the differing lives of the male and the female, and the mystic emblems of the maenadic Dionysus and of Themis, the goddess who ratified her divine approval of the world that would come into being.[3] These ritual actions, the so-called *dromena* of the initiation, had been accompanied by recited words, the *legomena*. All these things were secret, and what we learn of them from late sources comes from people who did not understand, or did not care to bother with, their meaning.

The identity of the drug in the *kykeon* must also have been part of the secret, the *aporrheta* or things that should not be spoken; but according to Aristotle, the Mystery was an experience rather than something learned.[4] Basically, it was *arrheta* or unspeakable. Both levels of prohibition pertained to the Mystery.

1. Quoted in Athenaeus 11. 478 d. 2. Plutarch, frg. 178 (Stobaeus 4. 52. 49, p. 1089 H); Themistius, *Oration* 20. 235. 3. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus* 2. 19. 4. Aristotle, frg. 15, quoted by Synesius' *Oration* 48.

The drug and the ethnobotanical myths involving it programmed the initiates for a homogeneous but essentially incommunicable revelation, a knowledge so profound that it rarely needed to be repeated. The foods of the earth acquired emotive and symbolic values and were patterned with connotations that had magical ramifications into the fundamental structures of the civilized society and its accord with metaphysical realities. Life itself grew like a plant, reborn from death, the inevitable sojourn in chthonic darkness; and the gods beneath and above the earth, both those whose privilege was eternally to die as well as they who lived forever, were joined in reconciliation. In this mediation, grain, as the plant of cultivation, was the ultimate prince, the dying hero who rose repeatedly into the celestial realm in rectification of the goddess Demeter's anguish for all her children's mortality. *Alphi*, an ear of barley, was the final revelation at Eleusis,[1] but in order to understand the Mystery, we must first sense the loss and recognize the darker siblings of the prince.

THE LESSER MYSTERY

At Agrai on the banks of the Ilissus, an initiate first became a *mystes* through the mimesis of Persephone's abduction by Hades.[2] The time was Anthesterion, the Flower Month, roughly our February, but in Greece the cold winter season when bulbs bloom. Persephone was picking flowers in a place called Nysa with the daughters of Ocean when she came upon an hundred-headed *narkissos* that the mother earth in conspiracy with the lord of death and his brother in the sky had specially prepared for her.[3] And thus began the Mystery, for the plant was narcotic, named,

1. Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 5. 40. 2. Scholia to Aristophanes, *Plutus* 1013; Athenaeus 6. 253, who cites Duris, a fourth or third-century B. C. historian from Samos, quoting a fragment of an ode in which Demeter is coming to celebrate her daughter's Mysteries; Hippolytus, *Refutatio* 5. 8. 3. Homeric hymn 2. 8, 428.

as the Greeks believed,[1] because of the numbness that it induced, and Persephone was carried across water in her sacred marriage to the realm of death. In the Turkish period, there was still standing a small temple on the slopes of Hymettos at Agrai, decorated with a frieze depicting the abduction of maidens called Hyacinthidae, daughters of the *hyakinthos* flower.[2] One of these Hyacinthidae was Oreithyia,[3] who was ravished by Boreas at that spot. Oreithyia's name is a transparent epithet for a woman experiencing ecstasy on a mountain and Plato records a rationalized version of her story in which she was merely pushed off the mountain by the wind while playing with a companion named Pharmaceia, the 'use of drugs.'[4] The grandson of this Oreithyia was Eumolpus, the 'beautiful singer,' who was the first hierophant at Eleusis.[5] His son was Keryx, the 'herald,' from whom the other of the two Eleusinian priesthoods was descended.[6] These traditions are un-

1. Plutarch 2, 647b. On the plant's toxic qualities, cf. Dioscorides, *de Materia Medica* 4. 161. Whether the *narkissos* was indeed the *Narcissus poeticus*, with which it is commonly identified, cannot be certain; some members of the *Narcissus* genus are in fact poisonous. 2. Extant fragments are now in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin. 3. Phanodemus, frg. 4 (Jacoby). 4. Plato, *Phaedrus* 229 c. The denigration of Oreithyia's ecstatic marriage is consonant with the general context of the dialogue, for Socrates' disregard of Phaedrus' attempt to seduce him, as well as Socrates' critique of Lysias' treatise on love, are intended as the prelude to the presentation of a different version of the ecstatic journey, one that moves toward a mystical vision in celestial rather than chthonic realms. The fact that the Lesser Mystery, like the Greater, could also be profanely celebrated would seem still further indication that a drug was in some way involved at Agrai (scholia to Aristophanes, *Birds* 1073-74). · 5. Pausanias 1. 38. 2. The genealogy of Eumolpus is a transparent allegory, for his mother, the daughter of Pharmaceia's companion, was the 'snow,' Chione, such as would be found at Agrai in the winter. 6. Pausanias 1. 38. 3. The Kerykes themselves claimed to be the descendents of Aglaurus. This genealogy too has herbalist significance, for Aglaurus, the 'noble one,' was one of the daughters of the first Athenian king. These daughters nursed Athena's foster child, the serpentine Erichthonius, who grew out of the earth from the seed of Hephaestus. The daughters had been told not to open the hamper basket in which Erichthonius was concealed, but they disobeyed and the sight of the child caused a fatal madness (Pausanias 1. 38. 3; Euripides, *Ion* 21 ff., 270 ff.). Some accounts alleged that they actually died from the serpent's bite (Apollodorus 3. 187). It was in the company of these daughters that Creusa, the Athenian queen, was picking *krokos* flowers when she conceived Ion (Euripides, *Ion* 889), a hero whose transubstantiality with a toxic flower is the etymological basis for his name (cf. C.

mistakable. The Eleusinian priesthood practiced some form of herbalism and the ecstatic abduction of Persephone was experienced in the context of the ritual gathering of some magical or psychotropic bulbous plant. Further confirmation is found in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, where a mystery initiation is parodied as a search for bulbs, while groping into the underworld.[1] We might remember too that Eurydice,[2] Creusa,[3] and Helen[4] were all picking flowers when they also experienced the sacred marriage with death. Such ecstatic rituals associated with flowers formed a very ancient tradition in Greek religion and can be traced back to precedents in the Minoan Period.[5]

Ruck, 'On the Sacred Names of Iamos and Ion: Ethnobotanical Referents in the Hero's Parentage,' *The Classical Journal* 71/3 (1976) 235-52). 1. Aristophanes, *Clouds* 187-92; cf. 255 ff. for the clear indication that the scene is intended as a parody of a mystery initiation. The *bulbos* is equated with the *narkissos* in Pseudo-Dioscorides, *de Materia Medica* 4. 158. Note that a porridge of 'bulbs' is an aphrodisiac in *Ecclesiazusae* 1091; the *kykeon* itself is an aphrodisiac in *Peace* 712. 2. Eurydice was fatally bitten by a serpent as she fled from Aristaeus (cf. Vergil, *Georgics* 4. 454 ff.; etc.), the 'best man,' who was himself conceived when Apollo abducted Cyrene to Libya (Pindar, *Pythian* 9). Since he was born in another world, we might suspect that his name is an epithet for the lord of that world; in a similar fashion, the Greeks called the sinister left side the 'better one.' 3. Euripides, *Ion* 889. Creusa was picking the *krokos* flower. So too was Europa picking flowers when Zeus, disguised as a bull 'breathing *krokos*,' carried her off to another world (Moschus 2. 68; cf. scholium to Homer, *Iliad* 12. 292, Hesiod, frg. 140, Merkelbach and West). 4. Helen was picking *rhodon* flowers when she was carried off to Egypt (Euripides, *Helen* 243 ff.), the land from which she traditionally learned all about drugs (Homer, *Odyssey* 4. 227-32). It was the *rhodon* or 'rose' that Europa also was picking (Moschus 2. 70). Oreithyia also was picking flowers when she was abducted (Choerilus, frg. 5, Kinkel). For further discussion of the theme of the maiden's abduction while picking flowers and for the chthonic connotations of the particular flowers that figure in these accounts, cf. Richardson, *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 140-44. 5. Cf. signet ring from grave circle A at Mycenae, *ca.* 1500 B. C., Athens National Archaeological Museum, no. *Pi* 992: a group of women present flowers to a goddess seated beneath a sacred tree that is being shaken to elicit its metaphysical power; the sacred nature of the scene is indicated by the simultaneous shining of both sun and moon above a layer of clouds and by the double axe beneath the cosmic phenomena, an analogous expression of the timeless point for death and renewal; along one side, opposite the tree, six bull skulls culminate in the apotheosis of a male figure hovering in the sky. Signet ring from Isopata, Heraclion Museum: a group of women dance amidst flowers; above them appears the apotheosis of a goddess, next to whom is a single eye indicating the visionary nature of the event.

The identity of the abductor in these ecstatic experiences was no secret, for although he is named Hades as the lord of departed spirits, Heracleitus informs us that Dionysus was his equivalent in such contexts.[1] Thus we can understand why it was at Nysa that Persephone was gathering flowers, for Dionysus was etymologically the Zeus or Dios of Nysa, the form that the celestial god assumed when he became corporeal in conspiracy with his nether sibling. Even without the testimony of Heracleitus, however, we should have suspected the presence of Dionysus, for he was the deity of inebriants and his female devotees, the maenads, experienced ecstatic possession during his worship. These maenads also gathered plants on mountainsides as we can know from their emblem, the *thyrsos*, a fennel stalk stuffed with ivy leaves. Theophrastus records that herb gatherers used to stuff their cuttings into hollow, fennel-like stalks to preserve their freshness[2] and the ivy that the maenads placed in their *thyrsoi* was recognized in antiquity for its psychotropic properties.[3] Nysa, furthermore, was the generic name for the place where maenadic rituals were enacted[4] and is similar to the words for sleep, brideship, and ivy.[5]

1. Heracleitus, frg. 15 (Diels). 2. Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum* 9. 16. 2. 3. Dioscorides, *Alexipharmaca* 2. 176; cf. Pliny, *Historia Naturalis* 24. 75. 4. Cf. Homeric hymn 26. 5; etc. There was a Nysa on Parnassus (Servius, on Vergil, *Aeneid* 6. 805; scholium to Aeschylus, *Persians* prologue 2), another on Helicon (Strabo 9. 405; cf. Homer, *Iliad* 2. 508), and one in Euboea (Sophocles, *Antigone* 1131; Euripides, *Bacchae* 556). Dionysus was born at a Nysa near the Nile (Hyginus 1. 8 ff.) and at a Nysa in Ethiopia (Herodotus 2. 146, 3. 97) and at a Nysa in Arabia (Diodorus Siculus 3. 66. 3) as well as one in Libya (Diodorus Siculus 3. 66. 4) and one in Scythia (Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 5. 74). In Caria there was a Nysa with a cult of Demeter, Core, and Plutus in a place called the Meadow where the sacred marriage of the maiden was celebrated (Strabo 14. 1. 45). Also in Nysa, Lykurgus, like another Pentheus, hunted maenads to oppose their revelry (Homer, *Iliad* 6. 130 ff.). Nysa, furthermore, was the name of Dionysus' nurses (Terpander, frg. 8; so also on an archaic vase of Sophilus, *Archäologisch-epigraphische Mittheilungen aus Oesterreich-Ungarn* 14 (1889) pl. 1). 5. The etymology of Nysa is not certain, but related words seem to be *nystaζo*, 'to nod and doze in sleep,' a reaction that would be attributed to the *narkissos*, and *nysos*, a Thracian word for 'bride,' and *nysso*, 'to sting.' In botanic lore, Dionysus' own plant, the *kissos* or 'ivy', was called *nysa* (Pseudo-Dioscorides, *de Materia Medica* 2. 179). Dionysus', name is often taken to mean the 'Zeus of Nysa' or the 'Divine Bridegroom.'

These maenads were not only drunken women, but mad women. The Greek language did not distinguish between madness and inebriation because Dionysus was the god of all inebriants and not of wine alone. The reason that he was associated with all psychotropic plants is to be sought in the nature of ancient Greek wine. Like the wine of most primitive peoples,[1] Greek wine did not contain alcohol as its sole intoxicant but was ordinarily a mixture of various inebriants. Despite the Puritanic bias of classical scholarship, we can know this with absolute certainty. Since the art of distillation was not known in Europe until the middle ages, the alcoholic content of Greek wine could not exceed about fourteen per cent, at which concentration the alcohol from natural fermentation becomes fatal to the yeast that produced it and thereby ends the process. Stronger wines can be made only by fortifying the beverage with additional alcohol isolated through distillation; simple evaporation[2] will not increase the alcoholic content since alcohol, which has a lower boiling point than water, will merely escape to the air, leaving the final product weaker instead of more concentrated. Alcohol itself was unknown and there is no word for it in ancient Greek.

Greek wine, however, was very intoxicating and it must be the other toxins that were responsible. In Homer's *Odyssey*, for ex-

1. For discussions of ancient technology involved in the production of wine, cf. R. Billiard, *La Vigne dans l'Antiquité* (Lyons 1913); D. and P. Brotherwell, *Food in Antiquity* (New York/Washington 1969) = vol. 66 of *Ancient Peoples and Places*; G. Curtel, *La Vigne et le vin chez les Romains* (Paris 1903); R. J. Forbes, *Studies in Ancient Technology* (Leiden 1965) vol. 3; Forbes, 'Chemical, Culinary, and Cosmetic Arts,' *A History of Technology* (eds. C. Singer, E. Holmyard, A. Hall) (Oxford 1956) vol. 1 chap. 11 pp. 238-98; Forbes, *Short History of the Art of Distillation* (Leiden 1948); H. Hodges, *Technology in the Ancient World* (London 1970); E. Hyams, *Dionysus: A Social History of the Wine Vine* (New York 1965); A. Neuburger, *The Technical Arts and Sciences of the Ancients* (New York 1969, reprint of the edition of 1930, translated from the German): C. Seltman, *Wine in the Ancient World* (London 1957). 2. More concentrated alcohol can also be produced by freezing the wine and discarding the crystals of ice; this procedure was used in northern climates, but the Greeks did not know of it.

ample, the hero makes Polyphemus drunk with a wine so strong that ordinarily one would have mixed it with twenty parts water.[1] Odysseus craftily does not dilute the wine for the monster. In Euripides' *Cyclops*, Polyphemus becomes drunk after just one taste of this same wine taken straight.[2] In Pliny's day, this wine still existed and a Roman consul reported that he found that it required at least eight parts water to be drunk safely.[3] The Greeks generally considered all their wines too inebriating to drink straight and they customarily diluted them with water, the most popular ratio being one part wine to three of water.[4] A connoisseur in antiquity would know how to combine his wines so as to produce particular effects,[5] for the various toxins in different wines can be shown to have induced diametrically different results.[6] A comic poet, furthermore, describes a social party at which the drinking of little cups of diluted wine induces progressive stages of inebriation; the third cup is enough for sleepiness, while after that madness results.[7]

At a symposium or social drinking party, the intensity of the inebriation would be ceremoniously determined by the leader or *symposiarchos*, who decided what ratio of dilution would be used. In addition to whatever herbal toxins were already suffused in the wine,[8] the mixing ceremony offered an opportunity to modify the wine's properties further by adding unguents and spices, as was the custom.[9] The ancient testimony about these perfumed unguents indicates their psychotropic nature. Testimony can also be cited to prove that inebriating herbs were indeed added to

1. Homer, *Odyssey* 9. 208-11. 2. Euripides, *Cyclops* 145 ff. 3. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 14. 53; cf. Pollux 6. 16. 4. Athenaeus 10. 425 ff. 5. Alexis, frg. 94 (Edmonds). 6. For example, the wine from Thasos was of two kinds, one a somniferent, the other a stimulant (Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 14. 117). For other evidence of the contradictory effects of wines, cf. Aelian, *Varia Historia* 13. 6; Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 6. 18. 10; Athenaeus 1. 31. 7. Eubulus, frg. 94 (Edmonds). 8. Cf. the so-called 'boiled wines' or *hephthoi oinoi*, Athenaeus 10. 31. 9. Aelian, *Var. Hist.* 12. 31; cf. Diphilus, frg. 17. 10 (Edmonds).

wine.[1] In addition to such evidence, we have a literary picture of Helen as the perfect hostess in the *Odyssey*, adding *nepenthes*, which was perhaps opium, to the wine in her house at Sparta.[2] And in Euripides' *Electra*, specific mention is made of a strong wine, a slight amount of which will be added to ordinary wine to increase its strength.[3] A wine's quality was called its 'flower'[4] and a wine 'deficient in flower' showed its lack in the quality of the resultant inebriation.[5] This flower could not have been the wine's bouquet, as we might now say, because ancient Greek wine, in the manner of today's retsina, can be shown to have smelled predominantly of pitch,[6] apparently from the material used to seal it in containers.

The wines reserved for sacral purposes were even more intoxicating than those for social situations, for according to Plato, they were intended to induce madness.[7] The vases for the maenadic Lenaean ceremony depict herbs being added to the sacred wine during the mixing in the presence of the effigy of the god Dionysus.[8]

The extraordinary virulence of undiluted wine offers still further proof that Greek wine contained herbal additives. A certain Erasixenus is described in an epigram as having died after drinking

1. 'Frankincense' or *Libanotes* induced madness and, if drunk in great quantities mixed with wine, even death (Dioscorides, *de Mat. Med.* 1. 81). 'Myrrh' or *smyrna* was a soporific (Diosc. 1. 77), as was also 'oil of marjoram' or *amarakon* (Diosc. 1. 68) and 'oil of crocus' or *krokos* (Diosc. 1. 64). Pliny, furthermore, noted that cyclamen added to wine increased its intoxicating properties (*Hist. Nat.* 25. 67). The same author records that oleander also was added to wine to intensify its ability to inebriate; the root was soporific and the sap induced madness (*Hist. Nat.* 21. 45). 2. Homer, *Odyssey* 4. 220 ff. 3. Euripides, *Electra* 497-9. 4. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6. 2. 6. 5. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1150. 6. Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 190 and scholia. 7. Plato, quoted in Diogenes Laertius 3. 39. 8. August Frickenhaus, *Lenäenvasen*, 72 nd Winckelmanns Programm, (Berlin 1912). Additional examples cited in A. Picard-Cambridge, *The Athenian Dramatic Festivals*, (Oxford 1962) 30. These vases show the female devotees of the god in ecstatic or maddened states of mind as they mix the wine in a *krater* or 'mixing bowl' on a table behind which stands the masked pillar of the god. On the table or strung beneath it are various plants and herbs. One vase actually shows a woman adding a sprig of some herb to the *krater*.

just two cups of wine straight in succession.[1] And in a fifth-century comedy, the drinker of just one cup makes out his will before downing the drink.[2] Several philosophers, moreover, were said to have drunk wine at the end of their lives to hasten death.[3] An historian records a drinking contest which proves the same virulence of ancient wine, for all the participants died, some immediately, others within a few days; the victor, who also died, had drunk four pitchers of undiluted wine.[4] It was such wine that was supposed to have permanently deranged Cleomenes, the mad king of Sparta.[5]

We can even find evidence that Greek wine sometimes was hallucinogenic. At the Anthesteria, a Dionysian festival that was not part of the Mysteries but which nevertheless bore some relationship to the ceremonies at Agrai,[6] specific mention was made of a drug in the wine[7] that was responsible for opening the graves and allowing the departed spirits to return to Athens for a banquet, whose hallucinatory nature can be seen on many of the *choes* vases depicting scenes from the festival.[8] In fact, someone in Aristophanes' *Acharnians* wishes his enemy a bad trip at the Anthesteria by hoping that he encounters a mad hallucination.[9] Still

1. Athenaeus 10. 436 = *Anthologia Palatina* 7. 454. 2. Hermippus, frg. 44 (Edmonds). 3. Diogenes Laertius 2. 120; 4. 44, 61, 64; 7. 184; 10. 15-6. 4. Chares of Mitylene, quoted in Athenaeus 10. 437, (= frg. 118, Müller). 5. Herodotus 6. 75-84; Athenaeus 10. 436. 6. A relief found in the bed of the Ilissus River (Athens National Archaeological Museum) shows the arrival of Heracles at Agrai with Hermes for the initiation; he and Hermes both carry *choes*, the pitcher-shaped vases characteristic of the second day of the three-day Anthesteria Festival. 7. Plutarch 3. 655 e. 8. For a catalogue and discussion of these vases, cf. G. van Hoorn, *Choes and Anthesteria* (Leiden 1951). 9. Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 1166-7. The aetiology for the custom of drinking from *choes* at the Anthesteria was thought to have been the visit of the mad Orestes to Athens at the time of the festival. Since he was polluted with the blood from the murder of his mother Clytaemnestra, who pursued him with a pack of avenging demons from Hades, the Athenians could not share the festival wine and food with him on an equal basis and instead they instituted the custom of offering hospitality not at a common board but with individual tables and pitchers of wine, a procedure that continued to be used thereafter at the festival so that the ghosts who came to dinner at the Anthesteria could be welcomed but kept at an appropriate distance.

more explicit is the scene with which the *Wasps* begins, for there two slaves attempt to escape their misery by drinking a potion called *Sabazios*, who was a Thracian analogue of Dionysus: it causes them to experience a so-called 'nodding Persian sleep,' during which they see strange things.[1] Furthermore, such well known hallucinogens as *mandragora* and henbane were often compared to wine with respect to the drunkenness they induced.[2]

As in all other cultures, Greek herbalists used magical procedures for gathering plants. Despite its non-literary nature, various aspects of this lore can be recovered. Plants, for example, were thought to contaminate each other by mere proximity. Thus hellebore imparted its drug to the grapes with which it was planted[3] and for this reason the vineyards of Elea produced an emaciating and diuretic wine.[4] Serpents also contaminated plants by their presence[5] or conversely acquired their own toxin by ingesting poisonous herbs.[6]

Certain aspects of this herbalist lore are particularly pertinent to the ceremonies at Agrai and to the worship of the god Dionysus. Psychotropic plants were apparently related to particular

The *choes* vases often depict scenes from this banquet, sometimes showing the unruly visitor or chthonic hounds disrupting the dinner. Orestes was typical of the wild, demonic guest at a revel; in the *Acharnians*, the chorus, as it prepares to enjoy the drinking revel, curses the choregus who had omitted to pay them at the Lenaea festival: they hope that a hound from Hades will snatch away his barbecuing calamary and that at night as he comes home feverish and hallucinating, a mad and drunk Orestes will split his skull, while he reaches for something to fend off the attack and finds only a lump of dung. 1. Aristophanes, *Wasps* 12 ff.; cf. 213 for an indication that it was something drunk that caused the altered vision. 2. The dark, juicy berries of *mandragora* (*Atropa belladonna*) or 'deadly nightshade' were compared to the grape both in appearance and in their hypnotic effect (Xenophon, *Symposium* 2. 24; Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 6. 2. 9; Hesychius, s. v. *mandragora*). 'Henbane' (*Hyoscyamus niger*) also had an effect 'like wine' (Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 25. 35-7; cf. 15. 30. 23. 94); its inebriation was like drunkenness (Dioscorides, *de Mat. Med.* 6. 15). Henbane was actually a common beverage for its inebriating qualities (Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 1. 13), particularly by the young (Pherecrates, frg. 72, Edmonds). 3. Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 9. 8. 8. 4. Dioscorides, *de Mat. Med.* 4. 162. 5. Nicander, *Alexipharmaca* 521 ff.; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 9. 5. 6. Vergil, *Aeneid* 2. 471.

animals that were thought to guard the plant and personify its spiritual power.[1] Thus, for example, Dionysus had taurine manifestations. The gathering of plants was a hunt and the plant itself, both as the child of earth and as the source of ecstatic possession, had a sexual identity necessitating some form of erotic mimesis. On one extraordinarily explicit vase, a female herbalist is seen harvesting a garden of *phalloi*.[2] Agrai, where the Lesser Mystery was celebrated, was the hunting preserve of the goddess Artemis, named for the *agra*, the spoils of the chase. We have a literary description of such a hunting preserve in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, where the virgin hero consorts with his beloved Artemis in a hunting garden tended by modest shame, *aidos*; but his stepmother Phaidra has conceived a passionate and illicit love for him ever since she first saw him at Athens, where he had gone to experience the vision at Eleusis, and she yearns to replace Artemis as his beloved in that garden of virgin modesty. Once she reveals her love to him and is rejected, shame or *aidos* causes her to kill

1. For example, 'black hellebore' was said to be so potent that it could intoxicate those who dug it up if they kept at their task too long since the toxin can be absorbed through the skin (Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 9. 8. 6). To counteract the plant's narcotic effects, the diggers ate garlic, drank undiluted wine, prayed to Apollo and Asclepius, and watched for the flight of the eagle, a bird that was considered to be the plant's guardian animal (Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 9. 10. 3). In the case of 'henbane' (*Hyoscyamus niger*, etc.) and silphium (an edible and magical substance that was probably a variable compound of several herbs imported from Africa), a bird was tied to the plant so that the animal rather than the herb-digger actually uprooted it and thus deflected upon itself the plant's animosity (Aelian, *Varia Historia* 9. 32). The magical plant *glykyside* or 'sweet pomegranate (?)' was associated with the woodpecker and had to be gathered at night, otherwise the guardian animal would peck out the herbalist's eyes or else bugger him, a danger that suggests that some kind of erotic mimesis was also involved in picking the plant (Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 9. 8. 6; cf. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 25. 29). 2. A fifth-century *pelike* vase, British Museum, cat. no. III 387 no. E 819: a group of plants are depicted as *phalloi* growing from the ground; a female herbalist is shown sprinkling flour of some kind over them from a small chest, apparently as a preliminary to gathering them. A specific literary mention of erotic mimesis occurs in Pindar's *Sixth Olympian Ode*, where the flower woman Euadne, in orgasmic travail, gives birth to a miraculous child, Iamos, a future clairvoyant whose name the poet derives from *ios* or 'toxin' and the *ion* flower (cf. Ruck, 'On the Sacred Names of Iamos and Ion').

herself, pretending like a Persephone that she has been ravished by her lover. *Aidos*, this principle of shame, is the feeling elicited by the sacrosanct, those things that can be uncovered only in appropriate contexts. Such are the sexual organs, the *pudenda* or, as the Greeks called them, the *aidoia*.[1] Artemis, furthermore, had religious and ritual functions pertaining to the rite of passage from maidenhood into motherhood; and in the tragic literature, the theme of the maiden's marriage to Hades occurs repeatedly in a flowering place sacred to Artemis.[2]

Herbal lore also endowed plants with emotions that the herbalist would have to assuage through appropriate gestures in order to alienate the hostility for the trauma of death in being picked. Thus the same plant could produce contradictory effects depend-

1. Further indications of a botanic religious theme in the tragedy can be noted. Hippolytus' death will be commemorated in a rite in which maidens will mourn for the loss of that virgin boy when they themselves leave his pure garden through the transition to motherhood (Euripides, *Hippolytus* 1425). His death, moreover, is a counterpoise to the fate of Aphrodite's beloved Adonis, a male who was also associated with a special garden and a ritual called the Adonia, in which women mourned for his death (in the form of withered potted gardens) from the too ardent heat of their sexuality. Hippolytus is an illegitimate child whose presence disrupts marital solidarity; so too was Adonis ritually sacrificed to reestablish the chastity of wives threatened by the allure of the courtesan's way of life (cf. M. Detienne, *Les Jardins d'Adonis*, Paris 1972). The meeting of Phaedra and Hippolytus in the context of the Eleusinian Mystery suggests an Eleusinian theme in the tragedy. 2. For example, in Euripides' *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, the maiden is married to death in a place sacred to Artemis (1463, 1544). Her marriage in that flowering meadow was a marriage to Hades and in the same poet's *Iphigeneia amongst the Taurians* or 'Bull People,' Iphigeneia is seen in another world, one with Dionysian connotations, where she plays the role of a priestess of death in the service of a captive effigy of Artemis; both she and the effigy will be rescued from their captivity by their brothers, Orestes in the service of Artemis' sibling, Apollo. The ritual performed at Brauron (modern Vraona) is established at the end of the tragedy (1446 ff.) and confirms the fact that the play involves the theme of the maiden's abduction and resurrection. Iphigeneia was probably a by-form of Artemis herself (Pausanias 2. 35. 1; Hesychius). It was said that at Brauron a bear was substituted for Iphigeneia in the sacrificial death (scholia to Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 645); at Brauron, in celebration of the rescued effigy, women and girls performed a dance as 'bears,' probably because that animal's hibernating habits made it an appropriate symbol of the maiden's chthonic ordeal.

ing on its attitude.[1] The maenads apparently attempted to pacify and control their god through role impersonation as his mothers, nurses, and ultimately his brides. The drug's mother prepared the potion. Upon her would fall the onus of murder. The other maenads by contrast were the good nurses who cared for the child, abandoned by his cruel mother. When ingested, the child would have grown to manhood and the former nurses became the god's brides, erotically possessed by the drug.[2] The child and the lover were of course identical and thus the maenads were often said to have eaten their own children[3] or to have ingested Dionysus raw in some animate form.[4] The mother's role was the unfortunate one, for if she should partake of the ecstasy, the possession might destroy her. Thus it was said that the prototypic mother of Dionysus, Semele, was deceived by Hera, disguised as nurse, into desiring to experience her lover in his full glory, the

1. For example, 'hellebore' was considered the antidote as well as the cause of madness (Menander, frg. 69, Edmonds); women wore the plant as an ornament (Nicostratus, frg. 33, Edmonds; Aristophanes, frg. 321. 6, Edmonds) and it was sprinkled around houses to ward off evil spirits. It was also called *Melampodion*, after the goat-herd Melampous or 'Black-foot,' who was supposed to have cured the daughters of Proetus of their madness. A similar duality for toxins is perhaps reflected in the tragic literature by the opposition of pleasant inebriation induced through the social ceremony of the symposium and the unritualized or asocial experience of drunken madness (cf. Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, *Ajax*; Euripides, *Heracles*, *Bacchae*). As further evidence of a drug's dual effects, we might cite Theophrastus' mention of *akoniton* (*Aconitum anthora*, etc.), which some herbalists could compound with wine or honey so that it would have no ill effect, whereas they could also prepare it in other ways so that it would be inevitably fatal, causing death at some predetermined moment, even as late as two years after administering the dosage (*Hist. Plant.* 9. 16. 4-5). 2. Homeric hymn 26. Note also the dual attitudes of those who tend the drug in the tradition of the Pharmakides or 'daughters of the drug,' who were two groups of women, one good and one bad, whom Hera called into being at Thebes when Heracles was born (Pausanias 9. 11. 2); a striking depiction of Heracles' botanic transubstantiality is seen on a Greek vase (Frank Brommer, *Vasenlisten zur griechischen Heldensage*, 1956, 40 D 1), where the hero is seen being nursed on a mountain by Hera, otherwise known as his arch-enemy: Athena, who has just previously given the hero to Hera to nurse, is seen presenting an herb to the goddess. 3. Plutarch 299 e; Aelian *Varia Historia* 3. 42; Apollodorus 3. 4. 3, 3. 5. 2, 2. 2. 2; Nonnus 47. 484 ff., 48. 917 ff., 9. 49 ff. 4. Cf. the *omophagia* or 'raw ingestion' that characterized certain Dionysian revels.

bolt of lightning that destroyed her and begot the child.[1] It was also said that she conceived Dionysus by ingesting him in the form of a potion made from his heart.[2] She was later resurrected by this same son, who gave his darker persona, Hades, a myrtle bough in acknowledgement of the marriage that redeemed her from death.[3] After her redemption, she was given the name of Thyone, an epithet descriptive of her maenadic brideship.[4] A literary treatment of such tragic motherhood can be seen in Euripides' presentation of Semele's sister, Agave, in the *Bacchae* when she returns from the mad hunt with the head of her son in her hands and joins the revel with the other group of maenads, who have no blood relation with the god.[5]

These maenadic impersonations can be seen on numerous Greek vases, where the women harvest the infant god or dance about his head, which grows from the ground in the midst of plants. On one vase, the maenads actually use pestles to attack Orpheus, who is analogous to certain aspects of Dionysus; his severed head was said to have been prophetic.[6] The vases also show maenads often consorting with the adult god, sometimes crowned with opium capsules;[7] or they are seen experiencing erotic possession through the intermediary of the lascivious advances of his ithyphallic satyrs. At times too, they dance in imitation of birds, impersonating the toxin's transport and animate identity.[8]

1. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3. 278; Hyginus, *Fabulae* 167, 179; Nonnus 8. 193 ff. 2. Hyginus, *Fabulae* 167. 3. Scholia to Aristophanes, *Frogs* 330; scholia to Pindar, *Isthmian* 3. 88. The initiates, like those in Aristophanes' *Frogs*, carried such boughs when they went to reclaim Persephone. 4. Homeric hymn 1. 21; etc. 5. The two revel groups in the play, the foreign, beatific Asiatics and the wretched Thebans, must paradoxically join the dual aspects of their experiences of the god into one revel band at the close of the tragedy (1167). 6. *Hydria* from Nola, *Archäologische Zeitung* 26 (1888) 3-5 pl. 3 (= illustration 5 in Roscher, s. v. Orpheus): Orpheus attacked by a Thracian woman with a mortar in the presence of a satyr. Other vase paintings depict his oracular head and it also figured in Aeschylus' *Bassarae* tragedy. 7. A. D. Trendall, *Frühitaliotische Vasen* pl. 24: Dionysus as Zagreus, the 'hunter,' attended by maenads and crowned with poppy capsules. 8. Attic red-figure *amphora*, ca. 470 B. C., Boston Museum of Fine Arts, no. 01. 8028: dancing maenad and flute-playing satyr.

We have specific mention of such ritual procedures at Agrai in the so-called 'mimetic actions concerning the Dionysus story' that were said to have occurred there in the hunting preserve on the slopes of Hymettos, a mountain without trees or animals but notorious in antiquity as today for its many herbs.[1]

TRIPTOLEMUS AND THE GREATER MYSTERY

Thus it can be no wonder that Demeter, upon her arrival at Eleusis, refused the cup of red wine that her hostess offered her, for the grief for her lost daughter Persephone would not allow her to partake herself of the body of the abductor.[2] Instead, she proposed a different communion, that of the sacred *kykeon*.

The Homeric hymn, our earliest literary source for Eleusis, presents the sacred myth, culminating in the institution of the Greater Mystery. There are three parts to the story. The first narrates Persephone's abduction while picking the bulbous plant with the daughters of Ocean, a thematic indication of the imminent voyage that will carry her across water to the chthonic realm, a journey synonymous with the death of her former identity in maidenhood. Psychologically, every marriage is a death, but in more rigidly structured societies than our own, the maiden quite literally was removed from her former activities and role as she passed into the captivity of her new keeper.[3]

1. Cf. Appendix: on Dionysus at Eleusis, p. 123 ff. 2. So too were the Erinyes, who personified the ancient and chthonic claims of mother's right, offered no wine in sacrifices. In Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, as the hero who had been born in the winter (Aristophanes, *Frogs* 1190) from a conception in drunkenness and who had married his own mother, approaches the place of his death, a death wherein lay some element of the Eleusinian Mystery (1663-6), the poet emphasizes his sobriety (100) as he enters the grove of the Erinyes, where his mortal blindness will end in final vision as he walks to the entrance of the other world. 3. C. Kerenyi and C. Jung, *Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis* (New York 1949, etc., translated from the German of 1941); S. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves* (London 1975) 62-5.

Since Ocean was thought to surround the inhabited world, he and his daughters mark the far boundary beyond which lay the other world. Examples abound in Greek literature associating the water journey with transport to another world. The maiden's marriage to death is the preliminary for the voyage to Troy in the Iphigeneia tragedies of Euripides, just as the similar death of Polyxena on Achilles' tomb is needed to rouse the wind that will carry the Trojan women back to Greece for their foreign captivity in the *Hecuba*. A more intricate instance occurs in Sophocles' *Women of Trachis* (or *Trachiniae*), where Deianeira, the daughter of Oineus, the 'wine maker,' is courted by a river or by creatures in a river; although Heracles, her husband, twice has rescued her, she maintains a fearful ambiguity about her role as a female, and attempting to regain Heracles' affection, she experiments with an untried drug that she acquired on her marriage night, only to find that her own destruction of her mate is the complement to the destruction she had always feared from him. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus*, the hero is visited in bondage by Ocean and the daughters of Ocean at the far edge of the world just before descending into Hades; and the presence of these visitors again suggests an herbal context, for the fire that Prometheus stole from Zeus is metaphorically described as both a flower and a drug, the origin of all human science,[1] a theft that like an herb-gatherer he concealed in a hollow fennel stalk, deceiving god by a trick enacted at a place called Opium Poppy or *Mekone*.[2]

After Persephone's water journey in the Homeric hymn, two different responses to her abduction are described. First Demeter, yearning for a stasis that would negate the possibility of ever losing her daughter again, attempts to make one of the Eleusinian princes immortal. When that fails, Demeter teaches the mystery of mortality and rebirth to Triptolemus, who is another of the Eleusinian princes and by some accounts a brother to the first.[3]

1. Aeschylus, *Prometheus* 7, 478 ff., etc. 2. Hesiod, *Theogony* 536. 3. Pausanias 1. 13. 2.

The precise identity of this Triptolemus was part of the Eleusinian secret, for the traveller Pausanias tells us that he intended to write further about the various accounts of Triptolemus' parentage but was warned by a vision in a dream to say no more.[1] It was Triptolemus who first sowed grain for cultivation, travelling throughout the world in a flying chariot drawn by serpents.[2] His gospel was the reborn seed, the barley or *alphi*, a word that can be traced to a formulaic conjunction in Indo-European for the food from cultivation as opposed to the natural food, *meli* or honey.[3] The barley for the Eleusinian ceremonies was specially grown in the Rarian plain and threshed upon the floor of Triptolemus.[4] Together with water and *glechon*, it was an ingredient of the sacred potion.

It has been suggested that *glechon* (or *blechon*) was the active psychotomimetic agent in the *kykeon*.[5] The plant is commonly identified as pennyroyal, *Mentha Pulegium*, a mint with mild psychotropic properties. This identification, however, cannot be certain since several plants were called *blechon* in the classical period.[6] There was no secret about *blechon* either, for it was openly named, sometimes in what would have amounted to blasphemy. In Aristophanes, it is found in an aphrodisiac potion[7] and as an obscene metaphor for a woman's pubic hair.[8] In the Indo-European formula for the ritual potion, it must be merely the natural plant in the barley-mix and not the sacred ingredient. Its symbolism in Greek herbalism further justifies its inclusion in the *kykeon*, for

1. Ibid. 2. Pausanias 1. 14. 3. 3. C. Watkins, *Indo-European Studies* II, 431 n. 19; 370 = *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 79 (1975) 182. 4. Pausanias 1. 38. 6. 5. Kerenyi, *Eleusis*, appendix 1. 6. Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 9. 16. 1-3; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 20. 156. 7. In Aristophanes' *Peace*, which is a parody of the maiden's resurrection, *Trygaeus* or the 'man of the wine dregs' is about to embrace his new bride Opora or 'harvest' when he notices that he lacks an erection; Hermes, who had helped him to excavate Opora from the earth, counsels him to drink down a '*kykeon* of *blechon*' (712). The reference to the Eleusinian potion would be unmistakable in this context. Cf. the aphrodisiac porridge of 'bulbs' in Aristophanes, *Ecclesiazusae* (1091-2). 8. Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* 87-9.

like all aromatic plants, it connoted illicit sexuality, being the stuff from which perfumes and unguents were made.[1] Thus *blechon* was both an aphrodisiac and an abortative,[2] for such smells were appropriate more to the courtesan than the legitimate wife, whereas rank odors signified the solidarity of mothers and daughters in the society's marital role. So it was that women celebrated the chastity of marriage and the incorporation of daughters into wifedom at the Thesmophoria, a festival in honor of the reunited Demeter and Persephone, smearing themselves and their beds with a rank-smelling herb.[3] By contrast, the presence of *blechon* in the Eleusinian potion signifies the illicit nature of Persephone's abduction and Demeter's refusal to countenance such a union with death. In ethnobotanical lore, Mint (*Mentha*) was said to be Hades' concubine, dismembered by the jealous wife Persephone. It was also said that Demeter showed her repugnance for the illicit union by grinding Mint underfoot or by condemning her to perpetual sterility.[4] Furthermore, one final objection to pennyroyal as the sacred inebriant must be its mildness, for it is too weak to have warranted the dangers of profane usage.

The second two parts of the Eleusinian myth suggest a different solution, one involving the mystery of Triptolemus' parentage. After Persephone's voyage to Hades, Demeter arrives at Eleusis, claiming that she too has been abducted from Crete by pirates across water. The Eleusinian goddesses were a sacred duo, often nameless, each related to the other as past and future. Thus Persephone's passage into wifehood seems to necessitate that Demeter relinquish that identity for herself, for she now disguises herself as a woman beyond the age for child-bearing. As she sits

1. Cf. M. Detienne, *Les Jardins d'Adonis*. 2. Dioscorides, *de Mat. Med.*, 3. 34. 1, 2; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 20. 147; Hippocrates, *Alimentaria* 2. 54. 4. 3. The plant was called *agnos*, the 'chaste tree' or *Vitex Agnus-castus*, associated with the idea of chastity by a pun on *hagnos*, 'chaste, holy.' For references, cf. Liddell-Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*. 4. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10. 728; Aristocles, *Fragmenta Graecorum Historicorum* 33 F 2 C, Jacoby; scholia to Aristophanes, *Plutus* 313; scholia to Nicander, *Alexipharmaca* 375; Strabo 8. 3. 14; Oppian, *Haleutica* 3. 486-97; Pollux 6. 68; Photius, s. v. *mintha*.

by the so-called Maiden Well, which was also named Anthion, the Flower Well,[1] and grieves for her daughter in the other world, separated from her by a boundary of water, Demeter is met by the maiden daughters of the Eleusinian queen and with the false name of Dos (or Doso), the Giver, she engages herself as wet nurse for the son of their mother's old age. These maidens too, like the daughters of Ocean, are water maidens, for they have come to draw from the well, and in their company, like another Persephone, Demeter passes into the Eleusinian palace, where her role is that of nurse. When she first had suspected that Persephone was lost, she had searched for her with the goddess Hecate and now in the role of nurse, she is again like Hecate, whose prototypic perquisite was that of nurse.[2]

These analogues to Hecate are extremely important for the Eleusinian Mystery and the secret of Triptolemus' identity. When Persephone returns from Hades, Hecate will become her constant companion also as she makes her seasonal journey back and forth from the lord of death. Both Persephone and Demeter are Hecates, for that goddess is the third that completes and joins the sacred duo of mother and daughter. Thus, as early as the latter half of the fifth century, Hecate was represented in the form of a female with three bodies.[3] It was said, in fact, that Hecate, like Persephone, was a daughter of Demeter.[4] The maiden, when married to death, became a Hecate,[5] a wife, like her, of the chthonic lord Hades.[6] Hecate represents the chthonic experience of womanhood, marriage as death and maternity as conception from death, the female's ancient religious power through her awesome com-

1. Pausanias 1. 39. 1. The well was also called *Kallichoron*, the 'Well of Beautiful Dancing'; what is supposed to be it can still be seen today outside the sanctuary's wall, beside the gate. It is here that the initiates dance in Euripides' description of the Mystery night as they prepare to enter the sanctuary (*Ion* 1074 ff.). 2. Hesiod, *Theogony* 450; Homeric epigram 12. 3. Pausanias 2. 30. 2. Cf. the epithet *trimorphos* or 'triform' applied to Brimo, a double for Hecate, in Lycophron, *Alexandra* 1175. 4. Euripides, *Ion* 1048. 5. After Iphigeneia's marriage to death, she became a Hecate; Pausanias 1. 43. 1. 6. Sophocles, *Antigone* 1199 with scholia.

13. Female herbalist sprinkling flour over a garden of *phalloi*.

14. Triptolemus as he embarks on his proselytizing mission, with Iakchos, Demeter, and Persephone.

pact with the terrible metaphysical sources of life. So too could Demeter be represented in her chthonic aspect as an Erinys, a spirit of vengeance for the lost maiden.[1] Like another great queen of the other world, the Gorgon Medusa, she was said to have been mounted by Poseidon in the form of a stallion and to have borne a daughter with a sacred name and another child who was a horse. In Phigalia, Demeter was called Melaina, the black one, and her wooden cult effigy portrayed her with a horse's head.[2] It was chthonic experience also that gave the female her power over plants in witchcraft. Thus Hecate was the prototypic witch;[3] and after the maiden's deadly marriage to the flower, Demeter as nurse in the Eleusinian palace promises to guard the queen's son from enchantments and from the plant cut at the base of its stem for magical purposes.[4] Psychologically also, the role of nurse must have had chthonic associations since the wet nurse would ordinarily have been a woman who had just recently lost the child of her own for whom her milk had been intended.

The theme of the trifold transformations of the female, furthermore, can be found clearly expressed in the tragic literature. Hecuba, the grieving mother of the dying Trojans, was shown as an Erinys in Euripides' *Hecuba* (or *Hekabe*, in Greek). In that tragedy, the death of Hekabe's maiden daughter upon Achilles' tomb and the discovery that her son has been murdered by his Thracian host convert Hekabe from her passive role of 'mater dolorosa,' the recipient of grief, into the role of its active agent or inflictor. The act of vengeance is performed by Hekabe and her Trojan women: the maidens amongst them, who are all being abducted from their homeland, change from abducted to abductors as they enact a violent seduction of Polymestor, while those women who, like Hekabe, have already experienced childbirth kill Polymestor's sons before his eyes and then blind him.

1. Pausanias 8. 25. 4. 2. Pausanias 8. 25. 5-7. 3. Euripides, *Medea* 394 ff. 4. Homeric hymn 2. 227-30.

This horrible ascendancy of the two previously suffering groups of women is finalized in the tragedy by Hekabe's forthcoming death in which she will metamorphose into a dog of Hades, an Erinys in the company of Hekate (Hecate). The similarity of Hekabe's experience to that of Hekate, as well as a pun upon their names, justifies this transformation. Note also that in this tragedy Polymestor had been out hunting on the mountains just before entering Hekabe's tent, from which he will emerge as a beast, the hunter, like Pentheus, converted into the hunted object of the chase.

In Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, Clytaemnestra also metamorphoses into a spirit of vengeance leading a canine pack of Erinyes for the hunt after killing the mate who was responsible for the death of her maiden daughter in a pretended nuptial ceremony.

So it is that Demeter too discovers the third stage of womanhood when her maiden daughter passes as bride into death's realm. As nurse to the late-born son of the old Eleusinian queen, she attempts her first solution, that of immortality. She does not feed him food or nurse him from her breast, but instead she anoints him by day like a god with the divine drug, ambrosia, and as he lies at her breast, she fills him not with human food but with inspiration. At night she places him in the fire, a rite of cremation[1] whereby his mortal flesh will be consumed. Although the child thrives on this diet, it is beyond his poor mother's comprehension. She objects and Demeter vows that the child must now be mortal, his ultimate achievement a heroic death in his prime. In the Eleusinian traditions about the hero Heracles, this same failure of the immortal solution is emphasized, for he too through his initiation learns that dying is a higher art than eternal life.

1. Cremation, as well as inhumation, was practiced at Eleusis from the early through the classical period: cf. Mylonas, *Eleusis* 60-1, 128. Cf. also Euripides' *Suppliants*, a play that takes place at the Eleusinian sanctuary and that ends with Euadne's leaping from the sanctuary wall upon the blazing pyre of her husband within.

The initiation of Heracles was, in fact, a frequent theme in funerary art.[1] He was said to have been initiated both at the Greater Mystery[2] and at Agrai, where the ceremony, it was claimed, had been instituted by Eumolpus himself to cleanse the hero of the madness that had caused him to murder his wife and children.[3] The two stages of his initiation are depicted in the works of art as sequential episodes encompassing the symbolic events at Agrai and Eleusis. The sequence begins with the Lesser Mystery, where Eumolpus, the first hierophant, is seen as he pours wine over a sacrificial pig while holding a platter with mushroom-shaped plants in his other hand; the pig was an offering to the nether goddesses and in the person of the sacrificial animal the initiate offered himself into their care. At the Greater Mystery, Heracles sits cloaked in mourning, waiting for the rebirth that is symbolized by the winnowing fan that the priestess holds above his head; and then he is seen reborn in the presence of Demeter, who sits upon the hamper or *kiste* of the sacred Eleusinian rite. Significantly the two stages of the initiation are each associated with a plant, the Lesser Mystery with the plants in the hierophant's platter and the Greater Mystery with the grain of the winnowing fan. Unfortunately, neither of the two works that depict the full sequence of events in Heracles' initiation were accessible for inspection in the summer of 1976, when Gordon Wasson visited the museums in Rome where they are stored; we will not, therefore, base our argument upon them, although it should be noted that the objects in the platter have been thought to be poppy capsules: in one depiction, however, the one on the so-called Lovatelli urn, the stems of the plants appear from photographs to be rather too thick to be real stems, while the same scene as it is shown on the Torre Nova sarcophagus depicts the objects actually standing

1. Cf. the so-called 'Lovatelli urn,' Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome; the so-called 'Torre Nova sarcophagus,' Palazzo Spagna, Rome. 2. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6. 3. 6; cf. Euripides, *Heracles* 613; Apollodorus 2. 5. 12. 3. Apollodorus 2. 5. 12; Diodorus Siculus 4. 14; scholia to Aristophanes, *Plutus* 1013.

on their stems, more in the manner of stipes. The objects in the platters presumably should be the same, but it is always possible that they are not and that in the latter instance they are simply cakes of some kind.

The meaning of this initiation of Heracles is clear from Euripides' *Heracles* tragedy, where two versions of the Heracles persona, the heroic and the anti-heroic, are portrayed in conflict. The heroic Heracles has just ascended from Hades, having brought back from there the dog Cerberus, the last of his series of labors; the anti-heroic Heracles, however, in the person of the 'wolf-man' Lycus, moves back toward the chthonic realm of his origin, the tomb and death. The heroic Heracles metamorphoses into the anti-heroic when he becomes intoxicated by the toxins he had subdued in his heroic phase, the aconite that came up from Hades with the dog Cerberus and the she-wolf 'rabies,' the madness that changes dogs into wolves. The play presents this metamorphosis as the paradoxical complement to Heracles' heroic persona and gives it an ethical value, showing that the love of humans for each other in the unbroken chain of mortal generations is a higher art than the loveless eternity that would unite Heracles with his immortal father Zeus.[1]

This mystery is what Demeter in the Homeric hymn first taught to Triptolemus. She orders the people of Eleusis to build the Eleusinian sanctuary. There she sits, vowing that if her daughter must die, then everything must join her in death through a plague of sterility that visits all the plants of the land, causing famine. The celestial deities implore Demeter to leave Eleusis and relinquish her chthonic intentions as a goddess of death, for she belongs with them in eternal life. The gods fear mankind will soon be extinct, with all men in the realm of Hades; if that were to happen, the delicate balance between the celestial and chthonic worlds would be offset and the gods of the sky would have no humans left to

1. Cf. Ruck, 'Duality and the Madness of Herakles,' *Arethusa* 9/1 (1976) 53-75.

honor them. Demeter relents only when Zeus agrees to send back Persephone. Like a maenad in her joy, Demeter rejoins her daughter but learns that, like the earth where she has been, Persephone has accepted some few seeds and thus belongs to both worlds, forced to return with the seasons to her husband's land of death. Demeter consents to this recurrent separation by causing the grain, which has lain infertile in the womb of the earth on the Rarian plain, to germinate, growing toward the time of harvest when the seed will wave in the celestial air.

THE SON OF THE TWO GODDESSES

The growth of the grain seed to fruition is the Eleusinian symbol of rebirth. The harvest is the child conceived in the other world.

At the climax of the Eleusinian vision, the hierophant, accompanied by a percussion instrument that imitated the sound of thunder in the earth, solemnly intoned the great refrain: 'The Lady Brimo has given birth to the Lord Brimos';[1] and the initiates, with a rapid alteration of emotions,[2] saw Persephone in the midst of a great light with her son, for Brimo and Brimos mean the Mighty or Terrible Ones. It was the queen of death, both Persephone and Hecate,[3] who were Brimo, triumphing over the chthonic experience of womanhood by bearing a son to the lord of death and thereby changing the destroyer into her own and mankind's saviour. His name was Brimos, but he had other names.

In the Homeric hymn he is called Ploutos (Plutus), the wealth that the vision at Eleusis assured for the initiates as their house guest, for so familiar did death become that his friendly presence

1. Hippolytus, *Refut. Om. Haer.* 5. 8. 2. Themisius, quoted in Stobaeus, *Florilegium* 120. 28. 3. Apollonius Rhodius 3. 861-2: Brimo is called *kourotrophos* as nurse Hecate and also 'queen amongst the nether people,' Persephone. Cf. also Orphic frg. 31 (Kern); Lucian, *Necromantia* 20.

maintained a constant prosperity stemming from the healthy accord between life and its sources in death.[1] In Aristophanes' *Ploutos*, as the god actually enters someone's house, the chorus dances an obscene parody upon the preparation of the sacred inebriating potion, using their bodies as mortar and pestle.[2] Ploutos is synonymous with Plouton,[3] a word that Plato derived from the idea that wealth rises up out of the earth.[4] In Sophocles' *Antigone*, he is mentioned together with Hecate as a god of funeral rituals[5] and in Euripides' *Alcestis*, his name is clearly an epithet for Hades.[6] A late source attests Ploutonis as the name for his queen, Persephone.[7] An entrance to the other world could be called a Ploutonion[8] and at Eleusis within the prohibited sanctuary there was in fact a cave so named with a temple of Plouton within. In Orphic traditions, this cave was specifically called a gate to Hades.[9] A large number of vases, furthermore, depict Persephone's return, often in the midst of plants and bearing an infant or a cornucopia as a symbol of wealth in her hands.[10] There can be no doubt that death as Ploutos was born at Eleusis as an analogue to the ear of grain.

Since Demeter and Persephone have the same chthonic powers and are united in the trifold figure of Hecate, it is no surprise that Demeter also was said to have given birth to Ploutos. The myth

1. Homeric hymn 2. 480-9. Mylonas, however, takes an extremely narrow allegorical view of the birth of Plutus or 'wealth' as 'the rewards of successful soil cultivation' (*Eleusis*, 18). 2. Aristophanes, *Plutus* 290-321. Cf. also Euripides' *Electra*, where the 'maiden' Electra is married to a noble but impoverished farmer; when means are found to enrich his very hospitable domicile so that a revel can be staged with the help of a special wine from the mountains, Electra pretends to give birth to a child in Hades, thereby being resurrected with a new mate named Pylades or the 'Hades gate,' while her former husband realizes his latent potential to be Hades by achieving wealth in Pylades' homeland. 3. Sophocles, frg. 273; Aristophanes, *Plutus* 727. 4. Plato, *Cratylus* 403 a. 5. Sophocles, *Antigone* 1199-1200. 6. Euripides, *Alcestis* 360. 7. Oracle quoted in Phlegon Trallianus, Josephus, frg. 36. 10. 8. Strabo 5. 4. 5, 13. 4. 14. 9. Orphic hymn 19. 12 ff. (Kern). 10. For photographs and interpretations of these vases, cf. C. Bérard, *Anodoi: Essai sur l'imagerie des passages chthoniens* (Institut Suisse de Rome 1974).

has obvious significance for the psychotropic nature of the ritual potion. At a banquet with the gods, according to Homer and Hesiod, Demeter became drunk on the divine inebriant *nektar* and wandered out into a thrice-plowed field in Crete, where she copulated with Iasion and conceived Ploutos.[1] Iasion's name means that he is a man of the drug. It is clear that Demeter too experienced Persephone's lover in a context of herbalism.

So too was Iakchos (Iacchus) said to be a son both of Persephone[2] and of Demeter.[3] He is another manifestation of Hades, a chthonic hypostasis of Dionysus himself.[4] It was he who led the initiates to the Greater Mystery, for in him the abductor at Agrai had become familiar and a saviour like Ploutos. He was the redemptive aspect of Dionysus. In Aristophanes' *Frogs*, Dionysus meets this other self in Hades after obscenely rowing across the swamp separating the two realms.[5] Since the lover and the child are but two aspects of the same figure, Brimo conceived her son Brimos from Brimos. Thus Iakchos too was said to be his own son.[6]

Under the epithet of Zagreus, this son of both Persephone and Demeter was called the Great Hunter,[7] the hunted botanic child grown to his mature role as lover. A related conversion can be seen in several tragedies where the hunter changes disastrously into the hunted in maenadic contexts as the female's pathetic role becomes active and she exerts the power of her queenship in

1. Homer, *Odyssey* 5. 125-8; Hesiod, *Theogony* 969-74. 2. Scholia to Aristophanes, *Frogs* 324; scholia to Euripides, *Trojan Women* 1230; scholia to Euripides, *Orestes* 964; cf. Hesychius, Suidas, *Etymologicum Magnum*. 3. Scholia to Aristides 3. 648; Diodorus Siculus 3. 64. 1; Lucretius 4. 1160; cf. Suidas, Photius. 4. Scholia to Aristophanes, *Frogs* 324: the scholiast records that at the Lenaean festival of Dionysus, the torchbearer would hold his torch and invoke the god while those in attendance shouted: 'Semele's Iacchus, grantor of Plutus' (i. e., *ploutos* or wealth). The exact quotation of a ritual cry must be authentic and, therefore, not a late source. Iacchus, as Semele's child, clearly must be Dionysus, who was her only child; it is he who as Hades has conceived Plutus, that is to say, himself in a redemptive persona. 5. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 340 ff. 6. Scholia to Aristides 3. 648. 7. Alcmaeonis, frg. 3; Euripides, frg. 472. 11; Callimachus, frg. 171; Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 10. 294; Aristophanes, frg. 228.

death.[1] Although Zagreus became implicated in the metaphor of such hunts because of the etymology that the Greeks saw in his name, the initial part of his name is probably not the intensive idea of 'great' but is rather to be traced to *zeia* and similar words for grain.[2] Here we come close again to the secret of Triptolemus' identity, for there were traditions that claimed that he too, like Ploutos, Iakchos, and Zagreus, was a son of that polyonymous couple who ruled in the nether world. It is important for us to examine those traditions.

According to the Homeric hymn, a woman named Iambe entertained Demeter in the Eleusinian palace, making the grieving goddess laugh by telling jests, probably of an obscene nature.[3] The poet claims that a similar thing happened at the Mystery, apparently a reference to the obscene insults that were cast upon the initiates as they crossed the final bridge to Eleusis. Orphic traditions recorded that Triptolemus was Iambe's son.[4] Because of the symbolic connotations of the Eleusinian palace and of the mothers and maidens within it, such a genealogy alone would suggest that Triptolemus was another of the nether princes, but his mother Iambe was further equated with a dwarfish, obscene woman called Baubo, whose husband was Dysaules, the Inhospitable One, a negative epithet for the Great Host who was the lord of death. Thus Baubo too was a Hecate as Hades' maiden bride

1. Cf. Euripides' *Bacchae*, where Pentheus' conversion into the dismembered object of the hunt occurs in exactly the same meadow where his cousin Actaeon was hunted by his own hounds because of his mother's curse (337 ff., 434 ff., 450, 731 ff., 1291). Note also the inversion theme of hunter into hunted in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hippolytus*. 2. The etymology of Zagreus at the 'Great Hunter' (cf. *Etymologicum Gudianum* 227. 37) is generally doubted (cf., however, *zagre*, which is glossed in Hesychius as a 'pitfall' for hunting wild beasts, an idea that has additional connotations of the 'grave trench' or the 'pit for chthonic offerings'). The initial element in Zagreus is perhaps not the dialectal intensive *dia / za*, but is to be related to the root for a type of grain, *zeiai/ zeia/ zea* (cf. Sanskrit *yava*, 'grain,' later 'barley'), a root that also occurs in the Greek verb 'to live,' *zao*. 3. Homeric hymn 2. 202 ff. Iambe's name may suggest the iambic meter or *iambos*, originally used for obscene abusive poetry. 4. Pausanias 1. 13. 3.

and wife.[1] Baubo herself had a name that meant the entrails and she can be seen in fifth-century figurines from Asia Minor as a dwarf with her face in her belly. It was said that Baubo's obscene jest consisted of revealing to Demeter that she, like another Persephone, had Iakchos growing in her womb,[2] a manifestation of a symbolic hermaphroditism achieved through the incorporation of the abductor into her own body as the little man or son, thereby negating the sexual polarization that had been responsible for the traumatic sacred marriage. Baubo's name, which is perhaps related to the *baubon* or 'dildo', also suggests her bisexuality.[3] These Orphic traditions cannot be used to prove anything definite about Eleusis, although the two religions share many ideas. Orphic dogma seems to have differed primarily in the emphasis placed upon the sinfulness of man's corporeal nature from which the mystery redeemed its adherents, whereas the Eleusinian religion aimed more at maintaining a ritualized compact between this world and its source and goal in the other. In any case, other non-Orphic traditions also suggest a chthonic genealogy for Triptolemus. He was said to have been the son of Raros, after whom the Rarian plain was named.[4] It was there that Baubo lived with her husband.[5] Both Raros and the Rarian plain

1. E. Abel, *Orphica* (Leipzig 1885) 289. 2. Orphic frg. 52 (Kern). 3. Cf. M. Delcourt, *Hermaphrodite: Myths and Rites of the Bisexual Figure in Classical Antiquity* (London 1961, translated from the French of 1956) 31. 4. Pausanias 1. 14. 3. 5. Clemens Alexandrinus, *Protrepticus* 2. 16-18. Baubo and Dysaules are aboriginal or autochthonous man and wife at Eleusis. In Orphic traditions their sons, the cowherd Triptolemus, the shepherd Eumolpus, and the swineherd Eubuleus, were tending their flocks when the earth parted for the abduction of the goddess and Eubuleus lost his pigs down the cleft. He is the 'man of good counsel and good will,' a personification of the 'counsel' of Zeus that lay behind the abduction whereby both life and death came into being. Eubuleus is depicted in art as present at the abduction, although not actively involved, for he was the beneficent version of Hades himself. Another man of good will was Demeter's son by Iasion, Eubulus, apparently a doublet for their only child Ploutos. Cf. Kerenyi, *Eleusis* 169-80. Although the stories about Eubuleus come from Orphic sources, he is an Eleusinian figure; he was represented as a handsome young man in a sculpture, perhaps by Praxiteles, in the temple of Plutus in the cave within the sanctuary (Athens National Archaeological Museum). He is clearly

are unusual words in Greek: the only other word in Greek that has an initial unaspirated rho is *raros*, a word found only in ancient grammarians, where it is glossed as meaning belly, embryo, aborted foetus, infant, and mighty.[1] In a fifth-century Athenian tragedy, Triptolemus had a brother whose father was Poseidon.[2] Since Triptolemus is the resurrected grain, it is appropriate that his darker self be expressed as a sibling with a chthonic father. An early historian in fact claimed that Triptolemus' father was Ocean and that he therefore had such a parent himself.[3] Triptolemus had a son who apparently reverted to the pathetic or Dionysian pattern, for his name was Krokon, the man of the bulbous *krokos* flower, who first crossed the frontier waters to dwell as consort to the Eleusinian Saesara.[4] By still other accounts, Triptolemus himself may have been that queen's son, for he was said to be born from the 'drunken' wife of the eponymous Eleusinius.[5]

What we are never told is that Triptolemus, like all the other princes, was a child of the Eleusinian goddesses. His iconography, however, does seem to suggest that role for him. He is seen on the great Eleusinian bas-relief in the Athens National Museum as the divine child in adolescence, ambiguously both the son and the lover of the two adoring goddesses.[6] Or he wears the crown of his royal rank on a *lekythos* vase as he stands opposite his queen Persephone, unless perhaps she is Demeter.[7] On another vase, Persephone sits in Hades holding the ears of grain that will be her re-

another manifestation of Dionysus, with whom he was identified in an Orphic hymn. Note also that the theme of cattle theft is formulaic in Indo-European contexts involving the sacred drug (cf. B. Lincoln, 'The Indo-European Cattle-Raiding Myth,' *History of Religions* 16 (1976) 42-65. 1. For references, cf. Liddell-Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*. 2. Pausanias 1. 14. 3. 3. Pherecydes, cited in Apollodorus 1. 5. 2. 4. Panyasis, cited in Apollodorus 1. 5. 2. 5. Hyginus, *Fabulae* frg. 147; on Kothonea, cf. Servius on Vergil, *Georg.* 1. 19. 6. Eleusinian stele, later fifth century B. C., probably from the temple of Triptolemus: Demeter presenting a golden ear of grain (now lost) to Triptolemus in the presence of Persephone, Athens National Archaeological Museum. 7. *Lekythos*, Athens National Archaeological Museum, no. 1754, 450-425 B. C.: Triptolemus crowned, with Persephone or Demeter.

demption.[1] Consistently, Triptolemus' proselytizing mission is presented as analogous to that of Dionysus, as they both travel throughout the world on winged chariots drawn by serpents, spreading their respective gospels of the vine plant and the grain. Triptolemus' message is the ultimate mediation with the earth through the art of cultivation. As he takes leave of Demeter, Iakchos, who is the redemptive aspect of Dionysus, is often in his presence. On one example, an Attic red-figured *skyphos* cup in the British Museum,[2] we see him seated on his serpent chariot, carrying several ears of grain in his hand as he sets out on his mission. Demeter stands in front of him and behind her is the daughter Persephone, with her hand raised toward her veil in a gesture of bridal modesty. In back of Triptolemus stands Iakchos, who also carries ears of grain in his hand. The chthonic origin of this metamorphosis into life is indicated by the mystic torches that both Iakchos and Demeter bear. With her other hand, Demeter is about to pour some kind of liquid into a broad basin that Triptolemus is holding.

The ambiguously doubled roles for the figures in the Eleusinian myth make the redemptive lovers sibling offspring of the mother, for thus too does she appropriate to herself the identity of the abductor and negate the psychological trauma of the original encounter at Agrai. Here too the theme is reflected in the tragic literature. Thus Antigone in Sophocles' play joins with her dead brother in a union of kindred blood, a marriage to Hades that is preferable to her forthcoming nuptials to blood that is not kindred but simply blood in the person of Creon's son Haimon, upon whose name as 'blood' the poet puns.[3] So too in Euripides'

1. Archaic black-figured vase, Roscher, s. v. Kore, illustration 3: Persephone as queen in the underworld watching the torment of Sisyphus. 2. Attic red-figured *skyphos*, 490-480 B. C., found near Capua, Triptolemus with the Eleusinian Goddesses, British Museum. 3. Sophocles, *Antigone*: the marriage to Hades, 1204-5, 1207, 1223-5, 891-2; her dead brother as 'kindred' blood, 891 ff.; the pun on Haimon's name, 1175. The play presents the 'ruler' Creon's realm of Thebes as one at variance with the other

Iphigeneia amongst the Taurians, the heroine is rescued from the consequences of her marriage to death by her brother Orestes and his constant companion, who is her future mate, Pylades or the Gate of Hades.[1] The theme can be traced as well in the two Electra plays, where Electra escapes from enforced sterility and a grievous domicile in the ambience of Hades by her union with her sibling and his silent darker companion.[2]

IDENTIFICATION

The Eleusinian traditions that we have examined clearly indicate that the two levels of the Mysteries were both involved with psychotropic herbalism, each with a plant related to the other as brother to brother in a pattern that balanced destruction with its complement, the redemption of human life and society through the arts of cultivation. It was the grain, ceremoniously gathered in

world; the pathways between the two have been disturbed by Creon's decree, the very 'sibling' (192) of his rulership, by which he attempts to separate the kindred blood of siblings in excluding one of the dead brothers from Hades' realm. At the end of the play, Antigone, Haimon, and Creon's own wife Eurydice have all chosen to join their loved ones in the better realm, ruled by the unwritten laws of religion. Note that Eurydice, who bears the same name as the abducted maiden in the Orpheus myth, was earlier married to Megareus (1303), the 'man of the burial chamber,' and it is to him that she now returns since Creon has proven to be the deadly one in causing her son's death. 1. Euripides, *Iphigeneia amongst the Taurians*: the marriage to death, by which Iphigeneia came to the Dionysian land of the 'bull people' (cf. 30) is a repeated element (27, 216, 364-71, 856-9, etc.) and the rescue by a sibling is an essential theme, involving Apollo's simultaneous rescue of his sibling Artemis and the concomitant redemption of his own prophetic voice from a chthonic capitivity (1234-83). 2. Sophocles, *Electra*: Electra is presented as a female whose potential for child-bearing, like that of her mythological prototype Procne, the nightingale, is self-destructive; by her union with her sibling, she escapes from Hades' realm, presenting Orestes, the 'mountain child' who was more hers, as she claims, than her mother's, to the inhabitants of the palace, thereby exchanging the maternal self-destructive potential with her mother, for whom the palace becomes a tomb. Euripides, *Electra*: Electra's union with her brother leads to the ruse of the pretended child-bearing whereby she destroys the royal couple and escapes from the impoverished house of Plutus (cf. note 2, p. 108).

the Rarian plain, that presented the ultimate mediation with the wild and deadly bulbous plant hunted at Agrai. These two plants, the winter bulb and the toxin that was linked either physically or symbolically to the barley of Triptolemus, induced the ineffable experiences and visions that were the essence of the Eleusinian initiation.

Cultivated grain, the symbol of the Eleusinian compact with the forces of the chthonic world, was thought to be unlike other plants in that it easily reverted to a more primitive form if it was improperly grown in the wrong conditions. This primitive form was *aira*, 'darnel' or *Lolium temulentum*.[1] It was considered an altogether wild plant,[2] growing amidst the harvest like another common weed in fields of barley[3] that also apparently figures in the Eleusinian complex, the 'pomegranate poppy' or *Papaver rhoeas*, a poppy whose seed capsule resembles the pomegranate in color and shape. We should note that poppies are a frequent motif in Eleusinian decoration, occurring usually with their four petals doubled to form roses of eight petals, whereas the true rose would have five petals or its double: the poppy capsule and the pomegranate itself were symbolic both of the marital abduction and of the fertile resurrection from death.[4] *Lolium*, however, as the weed amidst the harvest, not only represented the renascent primordial form predating cultivation, but it also signified the delicate balance that must exist between the staff of life and the irrational ecstasy that brought the maiden into the keeping of her chthonic lord; for *Lolium* is commonly infested with a parasitic fungoid growth, ergot, the sclerotium of *Claviceps purpurea* or 'rust,' named *erysibe* in Greek by the same metaphor of reddening corruption. Barley, the Eleusinian grain, was thought to be particularly prone to this infection[5] and it would have been quite evident how continually the cultivated grain was threatened

1. Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 2. 4. 1, 8. 7. 1, 8. 8. 3. 2. Ibid. 8. 9. 3. 3. Ibid. 9. 12. 4. 4. For a discussion of the poppy and the pomegranate in Eleusinian symbolism, cf. Kerenyi, *Eleusis* 130-44. 5. Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 8. 10. 2, 8. 8. 3.

by the wilder form with its infectious corruption. Demeter, herself, had the epithet Erysibe,[1] as though her gift of grain could exist only through the aversion of the darker persona that was her own and its antithesis.

The ancient Greeks were quite aware of the psychotropic properties of *aira*. Since Dr. Hofmann has shown us that *Lolium* itself has no pharmacological activity, these ancient traditions about *aira* or *thyaros*, the 'plant of frenzy,' as it was also called,[2] must be understood as indicating an awareness of the psychotropic properties of ergot itself. Aristotle, for example, considered *aira* a somniferent causing a heaviness analogous to the effect of certain wines.[3] We can know, moreover, that he was speaking of the ergot that grew on the *aira* in Greece, for Theophrastus tells us that the *aira* in Sicily differed from that of Greece in lacking such psychotropic properties.[4] In Latin, too, we have specific testimony of *Lolium*'s hallucinogenic activity, for a character in a Plautine comedy tells someone that he must have been eating lolium since he sees things that are not there.[5] Ovid, too, mentions the plant's effect upon the eyesight[6] and Pliny records that bread made from flour contaminated with lolium caused vertigo.[7] Greek farmers customarily removed the *aira* from the cultivated grain by using a sieve-like implement called the *airapinon* or 'aira-drinker,' a word that was apparently a folk metaphor for the blear-eyed drunkard intoxicated on aira.[8] In Roman times in Asia and Greece, bath attendants would drive their loitering clients home by drugging them with the steaming fumes of *aira*.[9]

We may surmise that at Eleusis the initiates partook of this drug that so obviously threatened to spread its corruption of primitivism and chthonic possession from the worthless wild weed

1. *Etymologicum Gudianum* 210. 25. 2. Pseudo-Dioscorides, *de Mat. Med.* 2. 100. For the etymology, cf. Frisk, *Griech. Etym. Wört.* 3. Aristotle, *de Somno* 456 b 29. 4. *Theophrastus, Hist. Plaut.* 8. 8. 3. 5. Plautus, *Miles Gloriosus* 315-23. 6. Ovid, *Fasti* 1. 691. 7. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 18. 44. 8. Hesychius, Cf. Ovid, *Fasti* 1. 691 for the term 'darkened' as indicating afflicted or altered eyesight. 9. Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 18. 44.

aira onto the cultivated harvest of barley, upon which mankind depended for life. In this communion, they would have shared in the earth-mother's ancient passion, her loss of the maiden and the burial of the seed; with appropriate pageantry, as the candidates spent the Mystery night huddled together within the initiation hall, life was reclaimed from its chthonic captivity and they all shared in the joy of a rebirth that reconfirmed the metaphysical compact with the sources of life in the dark realm of death. Upon this compact depended the entire civilized community and its institutions for their continuance. We should note, moreover, that ergot's obstetric properties were recognized in antiquity[1] and would have lent further appropriateness to the drug's usage in such a pageant of deliverance. Our conclusion about the role of *aira* or *erysibe* in the Mystery ceremony is further strengthened by their absence from all mythological involvement: this can be seen as a result of the Eleusinian taboo inasmuch as the other common source of ergot, *Paspalum distichum,* is rich in ancient lore.[2]

Large quantities of ergot-infected barley or of the weed *aira*

1. Pseudo-Dioscorides 2. 100. 2. *Paspalum distichum* was apparently not distinguished in antiquity from the other grasses in its family, which in Greek is called the *Agrostidai*. The ancient grass *agrostis* or the 'hunter plant' was associated in myth with the sea demon Glaucus and was reputed to have magical properties which must derive from its common infestation with ergot. Cronus was said to have sowed *agrostis* in paradise, the Islands of the Blest, where the horses of the sun god Helius grazed upon it to get the strength needed for their flight through the air. When Glaucus first ate of this grass that the untilled earth bears, he was engulfed in the sea for the archetypal voyage (Alexander Aetolus, p. 465, Rose, quoted in Athenaeus 7. 296 ff.). It was an event that involved his love for Hydne, a 'maiden of the water,' and when this man from Anthedron, the 'place of flowers,' ate the herb, he became immortal (Aeschrion of Samos, quoted in Athenaeus). It must have been a love like that which Hylas experienced when he, like another Narcissus, fell into the embraces of the water maidens in the pool beside which grew this plant (Theocritus 13. 42). It was also said that Glaucus found *agrostis* while hunting in the mountains, where he discovered that the hare he had wounded revived when anointed with the herb; upon tasting of it himself, he was seized by a divine madness and cast himself into the sea (Nicander, frg. 2, Schneider), a fate like that of another Glaucus who was the son of the White Goddess and a cousin of Pentheus and Dionysus. Glaucus' love affairs, moreover, brought him

would have been needed to supply the annual requirements for the Mystery. These would have come from the Rarian plain, perhaps from some portion of it devoted by the priesthood specifically to the systematic cultivation of the fungus. Such a partition might have been thought to enact a magical balance averting the otherwise inordinate demands of the more terrible aspects of the forces within the earth.

The winter bulb that was hunted at Agrai was an antithesis to the cultivated grain, for it was found and not planted, a wild creature that eluded domestication and would not be restricted by the arts of cultivation; it might abduct the maiden but not readily send her back. We do not know whether all the initiates at the Lesser Mystery would have partaken of this plant or whether, as seems more probable, they would merely have assisted in some way in the hunt and perhaps in the sacred marriage of the 'queen,' the wife of the sacral head of the Athenian state, who ceremoniously united with the god Dionysus in her royal residence, a place named the 'bull stable.'[1]

We can do no more than guess at the identity of the drug at the Lesser Mystery, but certain aspects of Dionysian symbolism suggest that the winter bulb may have been a metaphor or analogue for another plant that also seemed to grow suddenly from an egg-like bulb within the cold earth. This plant may have been the mushroom or *mykes*,[2] the untameable fungoid sibling to the ergot of the grain harvest. *Mykes* resembles the word

to Ariadne's bed, for he had fallen in love with her when she was abducted by Dionysus (Theolytus of Methymna, p. 9, Powel; Euanthes, both cited in Athenaeus). It was said that Glaucus could foretell the future (Diodorus Siculus 4. 489), an art that he taught to Apollo himself (Nicander, frg. 2, Schneider); the Cumaean sibyl was the daughter of Glaucus (Vergil, *Aeneid*. 6. 36). It was Glaucus, moreover, who built the Argo, the first ship ever made and the one that carried an assemblage of heroes on the primordial voyage to the magical garden of the witch Medea to capture the golden fleece for Jason (Iason, in Greek, the 'man of the drug'). 1. Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens* 3. 5. 2. *Mykes* is the most generic of the ten names for mushrooms in ancient Greek. Cf. W. Houghten, 'Notice of Fungi in Greek and Latin Authors, *Annals and Magazine of Natural History*, vol. 15 no. 85, 5th series (1885, Jan.) 22-49.

mykema, the roaring of a bull or of thunder, a pun that perhaps derives from the syllabary of the Mycenaean-Minoan period, in which the 'mu' syllable would have been written by the pictogram of a bull's head. The pun is most explicitly presented in a fragment of a fifth-century tragedy where the poet seems to have said, if the text can be trusted, that the land 'roared with mushroom-bellowing.'[1] The verse has been thought to be part of the poet's tragedy about Perseus, who was said to have founded the city of Mycenae at the place where he picked a mushroom,[2] a tradition that indicates a folk etymology for Mycenae (or Mykenai) from *mykes*.[3] A Greek amphora from southern Italy depicts a variant of the same foundation myth in which Perseus' decapitation of the

1. Aristias, p. 727, Nauck. The same bellowing sound (*mykethmos*) shaking the earth from beneath accompanies Medea's cutting of the magical root with which she will anoint Jason in the garden at Colchis (Apollonius Rhodius 3. 864; cf. 858-9: the root of the flower is apparently parasitic on an oak or beech tree). 2. Pausanias 2. 16. 3. 3. The etymology of Mykenai from *mykes*, although frequently proposed, was rejected by Krahe (*Gnomon* 17, 1945, 472). There seems, however, no reason why the city's name is not correctly associated with *mykes*. The declensional stem of *mykes* alternates between *myket-* (third declension) and *myke-* (first declension); the lack of *-t-* in Mykenai is therefore not significant. For a city related to a plant, cf. *Mekone* from the opium poppy *mekon*. Mykenai, furthermore, is a feminine plural, like Thebes (Thebai) and Athens (Athenai); as in the names of those cities, Mykenai derived from the nymph of the place, Mykene (Homer, *Odyssey* 2. 120; Hesiod, frg. 246, Merkelbach and West; etc.), the primordial bride whose descent into death there established, or continually re-established, the compact with the chthonic realm upon which union the living city could be founded. There was also a tradition about an eponymous male founder, Mykeneus, whose father was Sparton, the 'sown man,' apparently an autochthonous inhabitant like the Spartoe at Thebes growing from the land (Acusilaus, frg. 16, Jacoby = Eustathius on Homer, *Iliad* 2. 569 p. 289. 47; cf. scholia to Euripides, *Orestes* 1239). It is formulaic in foundation myths for the narrative to show a pattern of mediation between two versions of origin, autochthony and immigration; the autochthonous inhabitant quite naturally displays botanic characteristics and the mediation between opposite claimants to the place is effected via the sacred marriage. The name of the city Mykenai, therefore, would suggest that the *mykes* figured in Mycenaean religion. There was a tradition that at the neighboring city of Corinth, the original inhabitants were mushrooms that Sisyphus converted into men (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 7. 312-3; cf. Apollodorus 1. 9. 3). And at Athens the autochthonous man was Erichthonius, Athena's serpentine foster child who caused a fatal madness in his nurses; his guardian Erechtheus' name etymologically repeats the same collocation of metaphors, for he is the 'bellower' (cf. erechtho, orechtho).

Gorgon Medusa is equated with his harvesting of a mushroom that is the fruit of the sacred tree.[1] Here too traditions associated that decapitation with the *mykema* 'bellowing' sound that was said to have accompanied the 'queen' Medusa's ordeal in losing her head and simultaneously giving birth to a son and a flying horse, who was the source of transport and inspiration.[2]

Such bellowing of bulls and of the thunder that shakes the earth is a common motif in the descriptions of the place where maenadic women enacted their mad rituals.[3] An extensive treatment of the theme occurs in Euripides' *Bacchae*, where it is the sound of such bulls that Agave hears on the mountain as she wakes her women companions, who are her hounds for the maenadic chase; meanwhile, her son Pentheus, whose severed head will eventually be her catch in the hunt, has been vainly struggling at the bull stalls in the royal palace with a taurine Dionysus, who easily eludes him, shaking the house to the ground, and then leads him forth deluded toward the place where he will be dismembered by the huntresses in the mountains when they discover him perched like a beast in the god's own pine tree, transfixed by a bolt of lightning; Pentheus is a child of earth who has undergone a symbolic gestation in the sky to become reborn as the god's

Note also that the *mykes* stem seems to occur in the name of another mythical female who was associated with witchcraft and herbalism: the Thessalian nymph Mykale was said to have brought the moon down from heaven; she was the mother of a 'mountain man' Oreius, a lascivious centaur who was involved in the attempted abduction of Peirithous' bride (Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 12. 263). It is intriguing that Demeter had the epithet Mykalessia from her temple at Mykale in Boeotia, where it was said that Heracles, one of the *daktyloi* or 'finger men' wizards from Crete, each night locked and later reopened the temple; before the effigy of the goddess were placed samples from the autumn harvest, that remained fresh throughout the year (Pausanias 9. 19. 5). 1. Berlin Museum F 3022; cf. A. D. Trendall, *The Red-Figured Vases of Lucania, Campania, and Sicily* (Oxford 1967) chap. xvi no. 335; third quarter of the fourth century B. C. 2. Stephanus Byzantinus, s. v. *Mykale*; Eustathius, on Homer's *Iliad* 2. 498. I wish to express my gratitude to Lesley Cafarelli for calling my attention to these passages and for allowing me in general to profit from her work in progress on enclosure motifs in Greek metaphor and rituals. 3. Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae* 998; Aeschylus, frg. 57.

sacrificial surrogate.[1] Dionysus himself had been conceived by a sister of Agave when she was struck by a bolt of lightning. This manner of conception from lightning was also thought to be the source of mushrooms because of their sudden appearance after rain.[2] With the cult name of Bromios, Dionysus was called the 'thunderer' or 'roarer' and both his mother Semele and a kind of mushroom had the same epithet relating them to the thunderbolt.[3]

The *mykes*, furthermore, because of its phalloid shape as well as its etymological derivation from the idea of 'mucus,' was an obvious metaphor for the phallos,[4] the prominent emblem of the god Dionysus. The phallos metaphor occurs in what may be a significant passage in Aristophanes' *Wasps*, where the comedian, by a complex series of obscene actions and puns, climaxes a scene involving the penis as 'lamp wick, 'which was also called *mykes*, by noting its damp condition after intercourse as a presage of rain, an event that will favor the growth of some unnamed winter crop.[5] Since only the cap of certain psychotropic mushrooms ordinarily is eaten, it is also suggestive that the mushroom's stipe was metaphorically called a *thyrsos*, the hollow staff into which an herbalist stuffed the plants that were gathered.[6]

These observations, of course, cannot prove beyond a doubt that one of Dionysus' botanic transformations was some kind of mushroom or that the winter bulb of the Lesser Mystery was actually such a fungus. It has often been assumed, however, that the Greeks, both ancient and modern, have been as unaware of

1. Cf. Euripides, *Bacchae* 615 ff., 689 ff., 1082-3; 1064 ff., 286 ff. 2. Plutarch, *Moralia* 664 b; Athenaeus 2. 62 b; Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 22. 100; Plautus, *Stichus* 770. 3. Theophrastus, *Hist. Plant.* 1. 6. 5; Sophocles, *Antigone* 1139; Euripides, *Bacchae* 6; etc. 4. Archilochus, frg. 34, Diehl; cf. Hesychius, Herodian. 5. Aristophanes, *Wasps* 248-65; cf. Ruck, 'Euripides' Mother: Vegetables and the Phallos in Aristophanes,' *Arion* new series 2/1 (1975) 13-57. Note also that in Aristophanes' *Plutus*, as the chorus dances the obscene accompaniment to the god's visit, the phallos is employed as a mortar for preparing the *kykeon* and then becomes the intoxicant, wine without water, for them to lick like goats (290 ff.). 6. Apicius 7. 15. 6.

mushrooms as the scholars who have studied or lived in their country. This is not true. We can find mention in ancient authors of specific psychotropic properties for mushrooms, in particular one, associated with the oak tree, that was reputed to induce clairvoyance.[1] Furthermore, stone grave markers in the shape of mushrooms have been found at various Greek sites, some of them as early as the archaic period.[2] If we bear in mind the taurine manifestations of the *mykes*, there is even perhaps particular significance to a gold Mycenaean signet ring that depicts a divine epiphany as the seventh item in a series of bull heads in a scene showing women presenting flowers to a goddess seated beneath the sacred tree.[3] Today, species of hallucinogenic mushrooms can be found in Greece. They are called 'crazy mushrooms' instead of poisonous and the country people recognize that they inebriate, as they say, like wine, although in an entirely different way.

It is even possible that the ancient Greeks suspected that wine was produced, as in fact it is, by the activity of a fungus, for the poet Nicander called the mushroom an 'evil fermentation of the earth.'[4] The other world, in fact, must clearly have been the origin of all fungoid growths, for Hades was a place covered

1. Antiphanes, frg. 227 (Edmonds). 2. Donna Kurtz and John Boardman, *Greek Burial Customs* (London, 1971) 242-4: 'It would be easier to accept these [grave markers] as phalloi if any one of them bore the slightest resemblance to the organ with which Greek artists were well familiar. The asymmetry of the glans, and the duct and the testicles are never shown, and the knob is often flat, hemispherical or spherical. The only group of objects which all theses "phalloi" can be said to resemble is fungi'. 3. Athens National Archaeological Museum, no. *Pi* 992; cf. p. 87 note 5, above. This is an audacious suggestion, but note that Dionysus himself was called a 'bull-eater' (*taurophagos*) (Sophocles, frg. 668); also, the chorus of Eleusinian initiates in Aristophanes' *Frogs* exclude from their revel anyone 'who has not been initiated into the Bacchanals of the language of the comic poet Cratinus, the bull-eater' (357). For seven as a mystical number in chthonic herbal rites, cf. Apollonius Rhodius 3. 860-1. In the *Wasps* of Aristophanes, moreover, the procedure for drinking the hallucinogen is called 'bull tending' (10). Is it possible that the bull heads occurring in Eleusinian decorations and on vases depicting Eleusinian scenes signify something other than the mere sacrifice of a bull? 4. Nicander, *Alexipharmaca* 521; cf. 525 with scholia.

with mould,[1] the parasitic growth that is itself a sign of the resurrection that lies just beyond decay and putrefaction.

The symmetry of the two Mysteries would thus be perfect, for the winter bulb and the rusting grain were both the god whose gift to society was the symposium, the institution of the communal drinking of his wine. In the winter he had been born to play the ancient role of his mother's abductor. By her primordial descent as the sacred bride into the nether realm, death first came into existence and the pathways between the worlds were opened. At Eleusis the initiates received the beatific vision of her glorious resurrection with the son conceived beneath the earth as they too joined in a communion upon the body of the lord with purple-blue hair,[2] thereby renewing the balance that brought abundance and life to the civilized world. Henceforth, they would forever die with more confidence after a life of greater assurance for good luck and prosperity as the familiars of Ploutos himself.

APPENDIX: ON DIONYSUS AT ELEUSIS

Recently G. Mylonas, the latest excavator of Eleusis, has argued, contrary to most previous scholars, that Dionysus was not involved in any way at all with the Eleusinian Mysteries (*Eleusis and the Eleusinian Mysteries*, 275 ff.; the argument is further developed in his 'Eleusis kai Dionusos,' *Archaiologike Ephemeris*, 1960, published in 1965, 69-118). In order to refute this extraordinarily biased view, it should be sufficient to cite Pseudo-Demosthenes 59. 117. The oration is directed against a certain courtesan named Neaera in order to prosecute a man named Stephanus, who has

1. Homeric hymn 2. 482; Sophocles, *Ajax* 1167. 2. Homeric hymn 2. 347. The epithet has formulaic chthonic connotations, being used to describe Poseidon, particularly in his chthonic manifestations, and horses. The hymn also describes Demeter's dress as of this color (360, 374, 442, 42, 183). Magical plants traditionally are also of this hue (cf. Pindar, *Sixth Olympian Ode*, where the future prophet Iamos is named in a herbalist context for the violet *ion* flower and the serpent's drug or *ios*). The purple-black color of *erysibe* makes it appropriate for the nether lords.

been living with her illegally as her husband and has repeatedly attempted to pass off her illegimate children as his own and thereby as legitimate inheritors of Athenian citizenship. One of these children was a daughter named Phano, whom Stephanus had managed to marry off to an impoverished noble who happened to be chosen by lot to fill the office of the king archon, the sacral head of state who was in charge of the religious services, including the Eleusinian rites. One of the duties of his wife, who received the title of 'queen,' was to be betrothed and ceremoniously married to the god Dionysus in the month of Anthesterion on the third day of the Anthesteria festival. This ancient and mysterious rite was part of the Eleusinian prohibited knowledge and was reserved exclusively for a woman who was chaste and an Athenian by birth, neither of which conditions could Phano supply. Nevertheless, Phano impiously performed the ritual. The orator compares this scandal to another, for which the Eleusinian hierophant Archias had earlier been convicted. Archias had sacrificed an animal at the Harvest Festival or Haloia at the altar in the courtyard of the Eleusinian sanctuary, doing this illegally on the wrong day and in the company of a courtesan and despite the fact that it wasn't even his right to perform such a ritual. The orator points out that Archias was punished for his act of impiety despite his family's nobility. The jurors in Neaera's case, therefore, would be ridiculously inconsistent should they not exact punishment for the impiety of Neaera and her daughter, who have committed an outrage '*against the same god.*' This god is obviously Dionysus, to whom Phano has been impiously married; he is the same god honored at the Eleusinian altar and he cannot, therefore, be uninvolved in Eleusinian religion as Mylonas would have us believe.

The evidence that Mylonas cites to prove his point is, furthermore, misinterpreted. In the *Seventh Isthmian Ode*, Pindar describes Dionysus as Demeter's *paredros*, someone who sits on the throne adjacent to hers (3-5). Such an association between the two deities

is claimed by several other ancient authors (Aristides, *Orationes* 4. 10; Callimachus, *Hymn to Demeter* 70; scholia to Aristophanes, *Frogs* 338; Hippolytus, *Refut. Om. Haer.* 5. 20), all of whom Mylonas dismisses as late sources talking about a religion that had become contaminated by Orphic ideas. In order to dispose of Pindar's evidence, which comes from the fifth century, Mylonas has recourse to an ingenious interpretation. He explains that Demeter was hospitably received in the Eleusinion in Athens upon her annual arrival from Eleusis in the form of the sacred objects or *hiera;* in a similar fashion, Dionysus also was hospitably received in his theater for the annual Athenian Greater Dionysian Festival of Drama. Thus, according to Mylonas, the two were enthroned together topographically: the Eleusinion was in the north-west corner of the Acropolis of Athens; the theater of Dionysus was below the south-east corner. Mylonas believes that Pindar was such an admirer of Athens that he could never pass up an opportunity for praising the city. Such a contention, even if it were true, cannot be applied to the *Seventh Isthmian Ode* since it offers no opportunity for a reference to Athens. The ode was composed for a Theban victor and Pindar specifically announces that it is Theban themes that will be the subject of his poem: Demeter's attendance at the birth of her *paredros* Dionysus at Thebes; and the conception of the divine child at Thebes as golden snow that fell at midnight (1-6). It is inconceivable that in such a context Pindar could have intended a reference to Athenian topography or that the Theban patron could have found it appropriate for a poem in praise of himself and his native city to include a covert eulogy of a rival city. The subject of the poem is clearly the miraculous winter birth of the divine son and Demeter's attendance upon the child who is to be her mysterious consort, enthroned at her side, for such is the meaning of a *paredros* (cf. Aristophanes' parody of a sacred marriage between Pisthetaerus and the *paredros* of Zeus in the *Birds*, 1754).

With regard to the 'mimetic actions concerning the Dionysus

story' (Stephanus Byzantinus, s. v. *Agrai*), Mylonas has recourse to an extraordinary interpretation in order to exclude Dionysus from the Lesser Mystery. He expands *mimema peri ton Dionuson* (literally: 'mimeses about Dionysian things') so that it means 'pageants in imitation of and similar to the dramas held in the theater in honor of Dionysus, but with Persephone and Demeter as protagonists instead of Dionysus' (*Eleusis*, 277). This is truly an extraordinary way to translate the phrase. Furthermore, inasmuch as the Agrai ceremony involved Persephone's abduction, it would be difficult to exclude Hades, who was specifically equated to Dionysus, according to Heracleitus, as the agent for the winter-time maenadic possession, the time of year when the god himself was born by the bolt of lightning amidst the snow and rain. There is no evidence, moreover, that the Agrai sanctuary on the Ilissus had any kind of facilities for theatrical performances that could in any way be likened to those performed in the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. We know of no actors or poets who were involved in such performances. The phrase probably refers instead, as I have suggested, to the ritualized gathering of the Dionysian child, the plant responsible for the maiden's abduction to Hades.

Note also that Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae*, which in its entirety is a parody of the maiden's resurrection, assumes that women at an Eleusinian ritual celebration drink wine that they disguise as their babies (630 ff.), sacred orgies in which Dionysus, the thunder-born child of Semele, leads them, bearing the ivy *thryrsos* in the brides' thundering mountain glens (947 ff.).

Carl A. P. Ruck

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A Harvest/HBJ Book
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc.

08-ADS-953

0-15-625275-1